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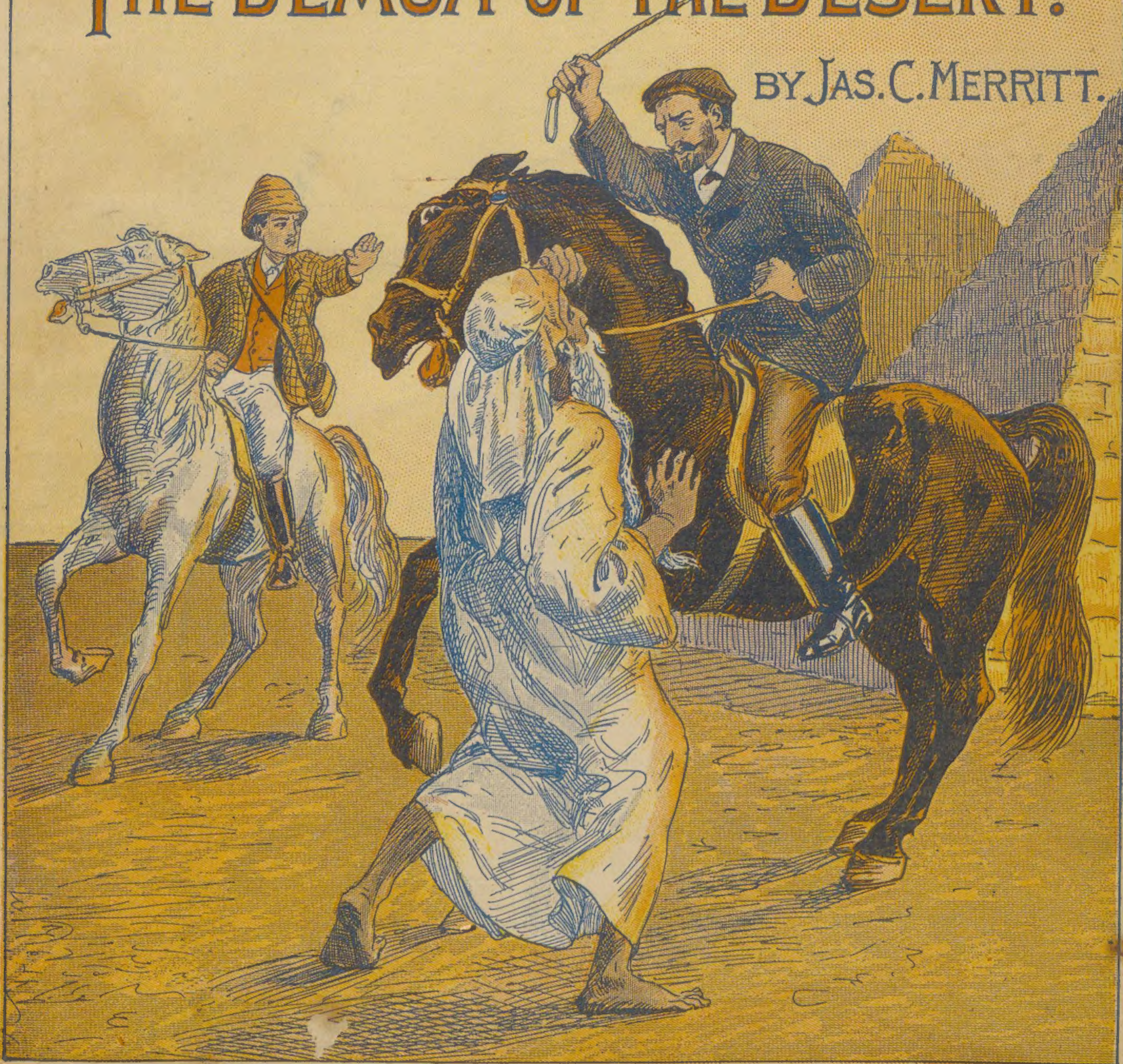
No. 79.

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 6, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.

THE DEMON OF THE DESERT.

BY JAS. C. MERRITT.



* St. Croix, with an oath, slashed the old man across the face with his riding whip. "Shame! shame! Monsieur St. Croix! Strike an old man like him! I did not think you such a base, dastardly coward!" cried Cal.

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No. 79.

NEW YORK, December 6, 1899.

Price 5 Cents.

The Demon of the Desert;

OR,

Young America in Africa.

BY JAS. C. MERRITT.

CHAPTER 1.

A STRANGE MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

Egypt! The land of the Pharaohs, whose civilization ended before ours began; the country of the pyramids, those mighty evidences of man's power, which for centuries have stood, grim and silent, gazing out upon the desert.

Cairo! The once proud city, built upon the banks of the Nile, and at one time the resort of the mighty, the learned and the brave, but now a mere bazar, a stopping place for curious tourists on their way to visit the wonders of this famous country.

"Hello, Gilbert! how are you?"

"Why, Cal, my boy, where did you come from?"

"From the glorious United States, of course, where you saw me last. I turned my practice over to a young fellow with more brains than dollars, and started out to join you."

"I am delighted to see you."

"Who knows but that I may build up a practice right here in Cairo, cure the Egyptians of their aches and pains, and finally become physician to the Khedive?"

"It is not at all unlikely."

"Indeed it is not. Here are you, for instance, Gilbert Brentford, attache of the American legation in Egypt. Who knows but in the course of a few years you will be charge d'affaires in Alexandria or Suez, or minister plenipotentiary to the Hotentots?"

"There's no telling what might happen."

"Consequently I, Clarence Atwater, M. D., called Cal for convenience, am going to set my cap for the Khedive, and turn Egyptian."

"When did you arrive in the land of the Pharaohs, Cal? I supposed that you were still pursuing your profession at Hawksnest?"

"There's where you made the mistake. You see it was just like this: I didn't really need the income which my practice brought me, being sufficiently well provided for without it, my father, as you know, having left me all of his property upon his death. I was the sole heir, and for the whole of it."

"Yes—yes, I know that."

"After you had left, there did not seem to be any use in my staying; giving bread pills to imaginative old women, and sugar and water to hypochondriacal old men; getting up at three in the morning to go ten miles in the rain and attend a sick child, and all that sort of thing."

"It could not have been very pleasant to a young fellow like you."

"It was not, and so I turned my practice over to young Nesmith, who really needed it, and started out to follow you."

"Why did you not tell us you were coming?"

"I did, because I know sensible people don't like to be taken by surprise, country cousin fashion, when perhaps they may have made other arrangements, so I cabled you that I was coming, the very day the steamer sailed, and telegraphed you at Liverpool that I was on my way."

"Neither message was received."

"Of course you can imagine how dreary life was to me, when my dearest wife, that is to be, was far away in Egypt's land."

"That's the main thing that started me off after you. I am dying to see Laura once more."

Gilbert Brentford's face turned pale at these words, and he gasped for breath, but said nothing. The young lady in question was his sister, and was engaged to Clarence Atwater, a young American physician about twenty-two years of age. Gilbert was twenty-five, and was an attache of the American legation in Egypt. He was stationed at Cairo, and was very much surprised early one evening upon coming out of his private office to run across his old friend and schoolmate, Cal, between whom and himself the above conversation took place.

He turned pale, as we have said, at Cal's last words, but the latter did not notice it, and continued, gaily:

"There's no use in standing here in the street, when there is a good hotel close at hand. Oh, I say, there's a cafe over yonder, is it not? I would ever so much like to go in there. I've not been in your old city more than an hour, and the train was so hot and dusty that I took a bath the first thing after reaching the hotel, and when that was done, started out to find you."

"Here I am."

"And how is Laura? I declare I have no business to be waiting, talking with you, instead of going at once to see her. She'll scold me well for not calling upon her first."

This time Gilbert's agitation was too apparent to pass unnoticed, and Cal caught him by the arm in time to prevent his falling to the ground.

"What in Heaven ails you, man?" asked the young physician, in great alarm. "Are you ill, feverish, or what? Come home, old fellow, and let me prescribe for you. I've got a small medicine case which I always carry, and I'll soon make you all right, and then you must take me where Laura is."

"My God, I wish I might!" broke from the lips of the young diplomat, and he had nearly fallen again, had not Cal put his strong arm around him and supported him.

"You are agitated, Gil, strangely excited over something; your sickness is mental, not physical. For Heaven's sake, what troubles you? Is there anything wrong with you or the folks? Has Laura—"

"Come into this cafe, and I will tell you all about it. You took me so by surprise that I was rather overcome."

They went into the dingy little hole honored by the name of cafe, and taking seats, ordered coffee and long pipes, together

with some choice confections, such as the eastern people are famed for making.

A slouchy-looking European was sitting in a dark corner, and Cal looked at him with a vague suspicion, whispering his doubts to Gilbert; but as the man seemed to be half asleep, and presently laid his head on the table, let his cigarette fall to the dusty floor, and began to snore sonorously, Gilbert said that it was all right, and the two friends drew up to a table as their refreshments were placed before them by a picturesque Egyptian wearing a fez cap.

"Now, Gil, old fellow, what is the matter?" asked Cal, taking a sip of the fragrant coffee.

"Laura has gone!"

"Gone!" cried the other, in surprise. "Where has she gone?"

"Would to Heaven I knew!"

"Explain yourself, old man. Did she go away of her own accord?"

"No; she could not possibly have done so."

"For mercy's sake, go on! Tell me all about it! This suspense is horrible!"

"She was stolen away by a band of wandering Bedouin Arabs!"

"How long ago?"

"Only yesterday. A fellow named Sheik Hassan has been prowling about the country, and the Cadi of the city had ordered the soldiers out to drive him off. He was an infernal scoundrel, and he and his horde of Arab devils had committed many depredations upon the people of the neighborhood, running off their sheep and cattle, poisoning some of their camels, and slaughtering others, stealing from parties of tourists, and raising Old Ned generally."

"Yes—yes; and this fellow Hassan, what has he to do with Laura's disappearance?"

"My sister occupied an outer room in the hotel, on the ground floor, and retired to rest early. She had been on a visit to Gluzeh and Cheops during the day, and was exceedingly tired, the more so as she had, on the previous day, been to see the Nilometer, and the little church built over the grotto where our Savior and His mother lived during their exile in Egypt, besides calling upon the Shah and going around among the curious places hereabouts. So, as I have said, she was very much exhausted and retired early."

"Yes! what next?"

"This morning she did not come in to breakfast with the rest, but we thought nothing of it until one of the hotel servants reported that my sister's window was open and that the room seemed to be in great disorder."

"Good Heaven! Go on, old fellow, go on."

"That alarmed us, of course, and we broke into the room. The bed was tumbled up, and the blankets thrown confusedly upon the floor. Chairs were thrown down, and the rest of the furniture was in a slovenly condition, the bureau pulled out of its place, and the drawers scattered upon the floor, the marble top of the washstand broken in two, and my sister's desk smashed into and rifled."

"The miserable thieves!"

"All of her jewelry and money had been taken, and even the little ornaments, silver vases and bronze trifles, together with everything valuable that could be carried away, stolen by the intruders."

"And Laura, herself?"

"Was missing! The clothes she had worn the previous day were gone, and also her lace shawl, one or two silk dresses, and an elegant camel's hair wrap that I gave her. The villains had evidently compelled her to dress, and had then taken such other things as had pleased their fancy. On the floor was a cloth saturated with some pungent drug, and outside, close to the window, we found a curiously-shaped glass bottle, containing the same compound."

"They had drugged her, the wretches!"

"Undoubtedly. A turban was also there, and a jeweled dagger, which was identified as one stolen from a gentleman here, by Sheik Hassan, near the Pyramids."

"And did no one hear the noise that the barbarians must have made?"

"The servants heard something, but thought nothing of it at the time, supposing it to be some of the guests that had remained up late, as we frequently do here."

"Are you sure that it was Hassan?"

"It must have been he, beyond a doubt. Some shepherds reported to me this afternoon that just about sunrise this morning they saw the robber with a large number of his followers gallop away from the city on their steeds, and that seated upon a camel was a white woman, whom, I have no doubt, was Laura herself."

"Would I had come before!"

"They made straight for the open desert and were soon out of sight. The men thought that something must be amiss, and they came at once to the city, where they soon learned what

had happened, because, as you must know, the news of such an event would soon be known all over Cairo."

"Ill news travels fast as weeds grow apace."

"They found me at last and reported what I have told you, but it was then too late. However, the governor has ordered out the troops, and we intend to start in pursuit of the marauders to-morrow at sunrise."

"I will go with you!"

"Thanks, old friend; I would sooner have you than anyone I know. It is getting close upon dark now, so let us return to the hotel. Where are you stopping?"

"At the Grand Cairo House, but upon learning that you were at the Royal Egyptian, I gave orders to have my duds taken there at once."

"I am glad you did, for now we will be near each other. Let's go there at once."

They arose, paid their bill and sauntered out into the narrow street, and at the same time the slouching figure in the dark corner that had been listening intently to everything they had said, arose, and waiting until they were well out of the house, followed them at a distance, keeping them always in sight.

They entered the hotel, and the slovenly man followed, mixing with the throng that at that time filled the smoking room; men of all nationalities and shades of color, and of various ranks, from the military commander to the poor student or courier, being assembled there.

After dinner Cal strolled alone into the office and the clerk seeing him, sent a boy to tell him that a note had been left for him at the desk.

Cal was handed a plain, sealed envelope, addressed in a strange hand as follows:

CLARENCE ATWATER, M. D.,

Royal Egyptian Hotel,

Cairo,

Egypt.

Private and Confidential.

The words "Private and Confidential" were underlined, and trembling with anxiety, Cal went out into the marble-paved court, hung with lanterns, where no sound but the splashing of the little fountain could be heard, and there tore open the envelope eagerly, the while his heart beat with strange emotion.

A single half-sheet of note paper was all it contained, and upon this were the following strange words:

"If you desire to learn of the whereabouts of Laura Brentford, nay, even see and converse with her, be at the base of the great Pyramid at eleven o'clock to-night. If you desire secrecy as well as speed, a swift horse will be ready for you outside the city gates any time after nine. Say nothing of this to anyone, or your journey will be futile. Trust implicitly in the writer and all will be well."

The note was unsigned, but in the place of the signature were three fine-pointed stars, arranged in the form of a triangle of equal sides.

"Whoever this 'three stars' may be," exclaimed Cal, thoughtfully, "I shall keep the appointment."

CHAPTER II.

CAL'S KINDNESS AND ARMAND'S TREACHERY.

Saying nothing whatever to Gilbert about the letter, and telling the clerk that he was going out for a few hours, but might possibly not be back as early as he expected, Cal threw the strap of his little medicine-case across his shoulder and set forth.

He reached the gates, and passing outside, looked about him. It was just after sunset, and the short twilight had almost ended, the stars beginning to shine very brilliantly.

As Cal stood gazing about him, evidently in quest of something, he heard the shrill neigh of a horse, and turning quickly around, saw a shabby-looking man—evidently a European—leading two swift-footed steeds.

"Those three stars up there shine with a peculiar light, do they not?" the man said, abruptly; "and see, they form a perfect equilateral triangle. Do you believe in the stars?"

"I have been told to trust implicitly in them, and that all would be well," answered Cal, strangely excited, feeling that the writer of the mysterious note was before him.

"Do you desire speed as well as secrecy?" asked the man, patting the neck of one of the animals.

"I desire speed above all things."

"And you can be secret?"

"Promise me one thing and I will be as silent as the tomb."

"And that is?"

"To let me see my affianced wife and bear her home to her friends."

"You shall see her; the rest depends upon your own strength and courage."

"Enough; are these the horses?"

"They are, and fleetest steeds were never shod. Let us mount and away."

"You accompany me?"

"To be sure. You do not know the way?"

"Certainly not," answered the young man, springing into the saddle. "Tell me, will you not," he continued, "to whom I am indebted for this favor?"

"My name is Armand St. Croix."

"You are a Frenchman?"

"Yes."

Putting spurs to his steed, the stranger gave his horse the rein and dashed off at high speed, Cal's horse following of his own accord, thus putting a summary stop to the conversation.

Cal, however, soon hauled alongside of his guide, and as they scampered over the sandy soil he managed to ask the man how he had found out about the young lady so soon.

"I can answer you nothing," the man said. "My mission is a hazardous one at best; and I dare say no more about it. I am an astrologer, and the three stars you see over our heads have revealed to me much. My own tact and shrewdness have told me more. That is all I can say. Were I to reveal all to you the stars would be angry, and my power would fail me."

"I am a Yankee boy, and I don't believe any such nonsense as that," replied the other. "I don't care, however, how you came by your knowledge, so long as it proves to be correct and I find my sweetheart."

"Despise not what you cannot understand, young man. You are a physician, and must know that certain medicinal plants are better at some times than others; or rather, when certain stars are shining their properties are beneficial, but when other stars are in the ascendant then they are deleterious. The planets affect us as much as the moon affects the tides."

The moon was up by this time, and the thin, long shadows glided swiftly on before them, while the stars twinkled brightly in the heavens, and all around lurked a stillness as awful as the shadow of death.

Speedily and noiselessly over the sands they flew, the miles increasing behind them and lessening in front of them, until they could behold the Pyramids standing majestically, overlooking the desert, one face bathed in silvery light and the other wrapped in deep shadow.

Beyond the fertile meadows bordering on the Nile, past the little village of Gluzeh and straight out upon the arid desert, rode the two men, the Pyramids looming up before them and growing larger at every step, until they seemed to pierce the very clouds.

Cal had often read about those wonderful monuments of a civilization that was dead and buried centuries before the discovery of the new world, and at this, his first visit to them, his soul was filled with awe, and he could but gaze with silent wonder and admiration at these marvelous structures, and hold his very breath in reverence.

Although it was night, they met many Bedouins as they neared the Pyramids, and these wretched creatures set up a howl for "baksheesh;" and as Cal had provided himself with considerable small coin, he occasionally threw a handful of it at the wretches, who scrambled and fought for the pieces as if they were the richest jewels of the mine.

At last when they were almost in the shadow of the Pyramids, an old man, quaintly dressed in a loose robe after the eastern fashion, and wearing a full white beard which nearly covered his wrinkled, bronzed visage, his long white hair falling upon his bowed shoulders, advanced, leaning upon a staff, and extended one shriveled, claw-like hand, asking alms.

"Pity a poor old man, Howadji," he said, in a cracked voice, "and help to render smooth his short path to the grave. Ninety and six years have passed over my head, my kindred have all laid themselves down with their fathers, and yet the ruler of all, the God of Arab and Christian alike, suffers me to wander alone upon the earth, poor, helpless and miserable. Pity me, Howadji, and do an act of kindness to one who will pray for you until the day of his death."

Cal threw the old fellow a trifle, which he received graciously, and then repeated his supplication to St. Croix, who swore roundly at him in French. The man seemed to understand, however, for he flushed and bit his lip; but, instead of going away, he advanced closer to St. Croix, and, repeating his prayer for alms, stood directly in the Frenchman's path.

The latter, with an oath, slashed the old man across the

face with his riding-whip, and would have ridden directly over him, giving him another cut with the whip as it was, had not Cal rushed to his assistance with the rapidity of thought, and interposed his own body between him and the brutal Frenchman.

"Shame—shame, Monsieur St. Croix! Strike an old man like him! I did not think you such a base, dastardly coward," cried Cal.

Then putting an arm tenderly around the old man, whom he thought seemed far more vigorous than his appearance would warrant, he led him away a few steps, and laying him gently down, held the aged head in his lap, while he proceeded to bind up an ugly wound in the man's cheek.

"You shall repent having used such words to me, you impudent young upstart!" roared the Frenchman, reddening and preparing to dismount.

Cal had been applying bandages, soaked with healing liniment, to the old man's face, being always ready for an emergency, and he paid no attention to the man's remarks, but continued dressing the aged beggar's wound, and the latter stood upon his feet once more.

Taking Cal a few paces off, he put his hand to his breast, and drew out something which he handed to the young physician.

"Take this, young man," he said, in very good English, "as a remembrance of the kindness you have done this night. Some day you may need help yourself, and this ring has more power than you think. Never lose it, as you value your peace of mind."

With these words, he placed a plain gold ring on Cal's finger, and then dashed away into the darkness, quickly disappearing from sight.

When the old man had gone, St. Croix came up, saying:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Atwater, for my hasty words. Let us resume our journey, we have but a few rods only to go."

"I was hasty myself," said Cal, "so let us say no more about it."

Before many minutes the great Pyramid was reached, and a shudder came over Cal as he gazed up at its summit, so far above him, and thought of how mighty the people in the past ages must have been to have compassed such a piece of engineering skill.

"Look there, Atwater," said the Frenchman, pointing to an opening in the side of the Pyramid some twenty feet from the ground.

Cal looked, and there in the flood of moonlight he saw his betrothed standing pensively, gazing out upon the desert.

"Laura," he cried, in ecstasy, dashing up the huge steps as if they had been nothing out of the common.

"Cal—Cal, save me!" screamed the young lady, and then she disappeared in the opening; but Cal followed close behind, and he could hear the sound of retreating footsteps right ahead of him.

Without a thought of falling into a trap, he rushed on in the darkness, guided by the sound of the footsteps, and occasionally catching sight of a fluttering dress as it disappeared around an angle of the passage. On and on he ran, until suddenly he heard a mocking laugh, and found his way impassably blocked up by a huge stone which lay directly across it, and beyond which he could not go.

Then he suddenly remembered his danger, and sought to return to the outer world; but after walking a few minutes, he became confused by the intricate winding of the passage, and realized to the full his awful position.

He was shut up in the Pyramid to die a lingering, horrible death!

He had been decoyed by the wily scoundrel, St. Croix, and through his love for a beautiful girl, had been caught in the snare with no trouble at all, and here he was, alone in the darkness—without the power of escaping.

Imprisoned in a Pyramid!

What a fate for a young man just beginning to realize his boundless opportunities!

God help him, for no human hand is nigh to aid him.

Betrayed, abandoned, the victim of as foul a piece of treachery as ever was conceived, the hapless young man felt the full weight of his terrible situation, and gave vent to a groan that seemed to come from the bottom of his heart.

The sound rang through the dismal passages, echoing and re-echoing a hundred times, and seeming to mock his agony.

"Entombed alive!" he shrieked, burying his face in his hands, and sinking upon one knee.

"Entombed alive—entombed alive!" shrieked the echoes, and with one last despairing, agonized cry, the poor fellow threw himself upon his face, and lost all consciousness.

CHAPTER III.

A NIGHT IN A PYRAMID.

How long Cal remained in a state of unconsciousness, never knew, but he was at last aroused by an overwhelm-

feeling of unutterable dread which threatened to overpower him, and drive him mad. He arose, and groping his way into a small chamber opening near the place where his path had been blocked, left it by another passage, walking along as swiftly as he could in the impenetrable gloom, thinking that he might be able to find his way out.

He could see nothing, hear nothing. The darkness was as unfathomable as the bottomless pit, and the silence as heavy and as unbearable as the darkness. He shouted, in order to have the companionship of his own voice, but the pitiless echoes sounded so mockingly in his ears that even his own words forced him to silence.

From one passage to another, now up now down, he wandered interminably, and although he must have turned upon his steps more than once, he did not know it, but seemed to be walking always ahead, as if the only way by which to escape was to continue moving.

At times the passages were low and narrow, and filled with rubbish, and walking was difficult; then they would be high and spacious, and often passages would lead from them in all directions, although the eye, not seeing them, was not so much bewildered as it would have been had the place been lit up.

Wearied with his constant walking, and yet seemingly urged on by the dread of being buried alive, Cal dragged one foot wearily after the other until he could scarcely stand. One single spark of hope in his breast appeared to glimmer amid the Stygian darkness of despair, and a voice seemed to whisper to him to keep on and he would eventually escape.

Even when he fainted from exhaustion, something appeared to urge, nay, even goad him on, and though scarcely able to stand, he staggered to his feet and continued his hopeless search for the way out of his living tomb, knowing all too well that he could never find it, and that he must die here, where he had been led by the treacherous hand of some secret enemy.

And she, the one most adored, his affianced wife, did she know of his fate? Had she perhaps consented to, and for all he knew, even assisted in his immolation! Horror of horrors! the very thought of it was madness! He would not think of such a thing for a moment. She was not capable of so diabolical, so inhuman, so fiendish a deed. No, it was St. Croix who had taken this dastardly revenge.

He could not imagine what motive the man could have for such a deed, and although he guessed that perhaps St. Croix had been in league with the party that carried Laura off, he did not see why the man should wish to hurt him whom he had never seen, unless he had mistaken him for Laura's brother; but then that could not be, as the mysterious note had been addressed properly.

How wearily the hours dragged on as he continued his ceaseless march, how slowly the minutes wore away. He could hear the beating of his heart as if it had been the ticking of a clock, and oh! such a slow clock; he thought the seconds minutes, and the minutes hours!

A night in a Pyramid!

The confined air was stifling to breathe, and he knew not what poisonous vapors it might contain, which, gradually benumbing his senses, would slowly drive him to his death! Oh, for one deep, long draught of the life-giving air from the sea, such as he delighted to breathe in his beloved western home; one, just one inhalation of that were worth a year of life!

Suddenly, as he lay there completely exhausted, his head bowed to the cold stones, the same unaccountable feeling of dread overcame him, and springing up, he rushed forward, while a wild shriek of agony rang from his pale lips.

Was that an echo he heard?

Had his mind then become crazed, and did he fancy he heard an encouraging cry responding to his shriek?

Was he going mad, or did he really hear an answering shout that bade him be of good cheer?

And that sound of footsteps?

Was it but the echo of his own, or was some friendly form hastening to his aid? Was it all a hideous mockery, or was it a glorious reality?

And the light he saw, flashing and dancing before his eyes?

Great God! was this all illusion, or was there help at hand? Was that a torch, or only a creation of his own fevered imagination?

Was he to be cheated by the visions of what he most desired, as the traveler in the desert, whose throat parched with thirst sees before him the images of purling streams and gushing fountains, majestic palms and waving branches, which he cannot reach, travel he ever so fast; or as the hunger-stricken unfortunate sees tables spread before him, covered with food, which ever vanishes when he would stretch forth his hand to clutch it? Was all this nothing but delusion, and would he, like Tantalus in the old mythological tale, have the refreshing cup of hope dashed from his lips just as he was about to quaff its invigorating draught?

No—no, it was true. The footsteps, the torch, the man, all were real and his deliverer was in sight.

But what a horrid form. What glaring eyes it had, what bony fingers, what wild, unkempt locks, what a tangle of white beard.

And that terrible roar, more like the cry of a wild beast than the voice of a human being. This creature could not have come to deliver him. No, he had come to destroy.

"Who are you?" cried Cal, as the uncanny figure rapidly approached. "In the name of Allah," he continued, "who and what are you?"

"The Demon of the Desert!"

"What do you seek?"

"Rest—rest—rest! Repose for my poor old body, tranquillity for my soul. Nothing can bring me these but the 'White Sun' of the Pharaohs."

What could the creature mean?

Was he human, and if so, was he a rational being, or, oh, horror! was he a madman, who like himself had been entombed in the Pyramid and had lost his reason?

"Who are you, again I ask you?" shouted Cal, as the horrible apparition rushed toward him, waving the torch in the air and stretching one long, bony, skeleton-like arm toward him as if to grasp him in his terrible clutch and tear him limb from limb.

"Ismail Ben Abdul, the Demon of the Desert! the descendant of the Pharaohs!"

He rushed upon Cal and cast the light of the torch in his face, seized one of his hands, and then suddenly starting back, he cried:

"Ha! 'tis the young American who did me a kindness!"

At these words Cal gazed earnestly at the figure, which now stood silent and motionless before him, and he at once recognized the old man whom Armand had struck with his whip.

"Ah, it is you. You have come to release me?" asked Cal.

"Release you! Ah, I see; that devil who struck me has left you here alone? By Osiris, had I known there had been treachery afoot, I would have torn the white devil's heart out, for I am the Demon of the Desert! The burning sand is my home. I come and go at will, and naught can stay me. How—adji," he continued, softly, "you have shown me a kindness, and the Sahara Demon never forgets anything. I am old, but my heart is young and always will be. Strength and vigor still remain to me, though I simulate weakness in order to receive alms, though I use them not and am no beggar. 'Tis a vile deception which I practice for a certain purpose. The day has been when an Egyptian would sooner tear his tongue out by the roots than tell an untruth."

"You are a strange being."

"Yes; but you are faint," continued the man, taking something from a niche in the wall, close at hand. "Here is food and wine, and better yet, water cool and sparkling. Aha, the Arab hounds understand a few things yet, and know how to keep water cool. Eat, drink and be glad. Thankful am I that in my wanderings through this tomb of my ancestors, I was brought to you, for surely you were in sore distress."

—Cal wasted no time in satisfying himself, and he felt very much relieved; the presence of a companion in this strange place contributing as much as anything toward making him feel more comfortable.

"Do you wander habitually through this place?" asked Cal.

"No; it is now some time since I was last here, but my mission must be accomplished, while yet I have strength, or I shall never rest easy in my grave. I am certain now that what I seek is here in this Pyramid, and when I recover it, my task will be but half finished, for a long pilgrimage is then before me."

"What is it that you seek?"

"The 'White Sun' of the Pharaohs!"

"I do not comprehend!"

"A jewel of rarest price, whose value would pay the ransom of all the slaves in Egypt. A pure, colorless gem, from whose heart springs a living fire, ever flashing, ever fading, kindling and rekindling, a never dying flame; a crystal of such hardness that nothing can break it; a diamond of priceless worth, the diadem of the Pharaohs, and worn by them through successive generations for forty centuries!"

"A jewel—a diamond? I have often read of such things being found in the Pyramids. You know it to be here?"

"Yes, the hieroglyphics tell me so; our traditions recorded in the temple at Timbuctoo tell me so. Yes, it is here that I shall find it."

"But what interest do you take in this jewel? You could not sell so rare a gem."

"God forbid! A higher mission awaits the 'White Sun' of the Pharaohs than a place in the bazar. It is wanted in the temple."

"And you; what is your motive for seeking this stone, and depositing it in the temple?"

"Listen! I am Ismail Ben Abdul Said, the lineal descend-

ant of the last of the Pharaohs, and from him I trace the line back to Sesostri the Great, Rameses, Thothmeo—all the proud kings of Egypt, are reckoned among my ancestors. I can count them back for fifty centuries. I tell thee, boy, the pride and glory of Egypt had already departed centuries before your petty world was thought of. The blood of the mighty ones of the earth flows in my veins. I am the last and only living descendant of a long line of kings—the Pharaohs, whom all the world know and revere; and when it suits my purpose, I am the brother of the sirocco, the companion of the whirlwind—I am the Demon of the Desert!”

“And this diamond?” asked Cal, not knowing what to make of his strange companion.

“Was the diadem of the Pharaohs, and, on account of its great brilliancy, was called the ‘White Sun.’ Father handed it down to son, and he, in turn, to his son; and so it descended through a long and most illustrious line. Its age is incalculable, and its beauty is known by every true Mohammedan—for do not the sacred books say: ‘The deeds of a good man, they shall shine like the diadem of the Pharaohs, and all the world shall praise them?’ This refers to the famous jewel.”

“Why has it been neglected so long?”

“For ages it has been forgotten; but, as one after another of the relics of the past began to appear, it was remembered, because it is mentioned in many of our writings. I, as the last representative of a mighty but now fallen race, resolved to recover this treasure—which is regarded with the most holy reverence by the true believer—and making a pilgrimage across the desert to the holy temple at Timbuctoo, there solemnly deposit it with due ceremony, and there it shall remain forever!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE ‘WHITE SUN’ OF THE PHARAOHS IS RECOVERED AND AGAIN LOST.

“And you believe you will find it here, in this place?”

“Yes, I must, but I may need your assistance. The descendants of the Pharaohs does not disdain to ask help from one who has done him a kindness. Boy! the scar on my cheek will perhaps fade away, but the memory of your noble conduct, never! That one act shall do more to bless and prosper you after years than you can imagine; for though the body of the Desert Demon may die, his soul never will, and be sure that it will always keep watch over your welfare.”

“Why are you called the Demon of the Desert?”

“Ha-ha! ‘tis a merry question!” shrieked the strange creature, whom Cal did not know whether to believe insane or not. “Ha-ha! ask the thieving Arabs why I am thus called. Ask who it is who sweeps down upon them like the sand-storm, and with a single hand scatters them far and wide; who it is that they dread the most, who pursues them most relentlessly, who appears at all times and all places. They will answer you, the Demon of the Desert! Ha-ha! I hate the Bedouin and my hand is against him, for I am an Egyptian and have my ancestry in a line of kings; I am the devil of Sahara, and well do they tremble when I appear.”

“Let us depart from this terrible place,” said Cal, interrupting this wild harangue; “I cannot bear the gloom of the place, it overcomes me like a heavy weight.”

“Only let me once meet that Sheik Hassan and I will tear his cowardly heart out, and he will rue the day he ever met Ismail Ben Abdul.”

“You are an Egyptian, and yet you bear an Arabic name; how is that?”

“No one knows my name but myself, and none ever shall,” answered the man, frowning. “It suits my purpose to be called Ismail, an outcast, a wanderer! Lead on, boy—lead on. No, follow me, and we will find the priceless gem, and then—liberty for you, a long pilgrimage for me!”

“You know the way out?”

“Ay, there is little I do not know of the Pyramids; follow me, and be silent.”

He led the way, first lighting a fresh torch, the other being extinguished, and with rapid steps traversed passage after passage, until at last he reached a small chamber in which were fine pieces of sculpture on the walls.

“Ha! this chamber has been open since I was here before. I do not remember it, and, by Osiris, ‘tis the very one I wished to find!” muttered the aged Egyptian, as he entered this place and cast the light of his torch around him.

He had not observed that, as he walked, a shadowy form lingered not far behind, and watched his every movement, and while hidden from sight kept in view, his face being distorted with passion, a cruel smile at times showing itself on his swarthy visage, while he played with the edge of a keen dagger and stroked his black beard.

Ever near, ever wary, this figure watched the two, and when the old man spoke of hating the Bedouin, this man only smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

“Hold up the light, American,” commanded Ismail, at length, when they stood in the small chamber. “Higher, so, that’s it. Ha-ha, I was not deceived. Do you see those characters? You cannot read them to me, but they are as plain as day, for I am learned in such things.”

“What do they say?”

“That here in this chamber is hidden the sacred talisman, the ‘White Sun’ of the Pharaohs! Do you see those pictured representations of dogs, cats and odd-looking birds?”

“I do; these animals were held sacred by the Egyptians, were they not?”

“Yes, and are still. This small apartment was once devoted to the worship of Isis and Osiris. Do you see the winged globe surrounded by serpents? ‘Tis the emblem of eternity, of power and wisdom and of time. Hold the light closer! Ha, I have found it—I have found it! Think you that you can climb up to yonder small recess, just below the largest sculpture?”

“I don’t know, I can try.”

“Here, give me the light! Now mount upon my shoulder. Fear not for me, I can support you. I am not the wreck you think me. Ha-ha, good, there you are, boy, on the shoulders of the descendant of the Pharaohs! Tell that to your grandchildren, when you reach my age, and be proud to tell it, for Ismail does not carry fools or cowards upon his back.”

Cal stood up, his feet resting on either shoulder of the old man, who stood as firm as a rock, while he handed the young man the torch and bade him clear away the rubbish from the fissure just below the sculptured image of an Egyptian king mounted upon a horse and holding a long spear in his hand.

Cal found that there was quite a long and deep recess here, the height being sufficient to allow a man to lie down at ease; and our hero doubted not that here reposed the body of one of the old kings, or at least some person of distinction.

The hole had evidently been once closed by a slab, but the hammers of impertinent tourists and relic-hunters had chipped away piece after piece until but little remained, and Cal found no trouble in removing the rest, thereby disclosing a mass of rubbish, the remains of rich silks and gold embroidered robes, which he tore away with his hands and threw on the stone floor below, deepening the opening.

“What do you find, now, boy?” asked the Egyptian. “Put your hand to the extreme right—so, there, what do you see?”

“Some long, round body, heavily swathed in perfumed cloths, filled thickly with some oily substance.”

“Tear them away. Now, what is it?”

“Great Heaven! look out—look out, don’t let me fall,” cried Cal, in a fright.

The old man held on to him and kept him from falling, and Cal getting over his fright, tore away the wrappings swiftly and completely, and called out:

“It is the mummy of a woman, and I can feel something like a string of beads around her neck.”

“You have a knife—a sharp one?”

“Yes.”

“Then cut away the cloths and unclasp the necklace. It is yours. So is everything you find but the one priceless jewel.”

“By George, what a treasure!” said Cal, in a few moments, holding up a glittering necklace, composed of various jewels, each one exquisitely and daintily carved, and all set differently, the whole forming an harmonious piece of workmanship, such as is never seen in these times. Cal had seen nothing like it in his life, and he had been in some of the most famous museums of the world.

“Keep it, boy, keep it; now search on and tell me what you find.”

He thrust the wondrous emblem into his pocket, and presently brought out a small rectangular casket, hermetically sealed, with a covering of lead.

“Keep that, too,” said the Egyptian, excitedly. “Continue thy search, boy, but be quick; the torch is going out, and ‘tis my last.”

Cal pulled away the rubbish and threw the mummy contemptuously upon the floor, at which the old Egyptian only smiled and said: “Ah, they were foolish people to preserve the bodies of their beloved ones, only to have them despoiled in later years by foreign barbarians. Well, of what use is the casket after the jewel is taken away?”

A cry from Cal aroused him from his revery, and looking up, he saw the young man with his body half in the recess.

“Push my feet up higher,” called Cal, and the old man did so, after taking the torch which Cal had dropped, the young man disappearing entirely within the recess.

“Hold the light up higher; there, that’s it. Eureka!”

“Have you found it?” said the old man, with terrible earnestness, fairly trembling in his excitement.

“I think so,” was the muffled response, and then, after a

pause, which seemed to last an hour, Cal's feet and legs appeared, and he called to the Egyptian to catch him.

Ismail did so, and, standing on the old man's shoulders, Cal held up a box, which was a perfect cube, about three inches on a side, covered with lead.

"I found it resting on a little shelf inside, all covered with gold ornaments and loose, unset jewels," said Cal, "and by the inscription, I judged it to be the very thing."

"Open it—open it," said Ismail. "It can be no other than the diadem I seek."

"I put its humble companions in my pocket," answered Cal, ripping off the outer covering of lead with difficulty and disclosing a box made of some very hard and highly perfumed wood, beautifully polished and inlaid with pearl.

He quickly wrenched off the cover, and, pulling something out that looked like an egg, tore off wrapping after wrapping of papyrus and silk, and finally, with a wild shout, held up an object that sparkled and glittered in the light like a living fire!

"Look—look, Ismail! Is this it?" asked Cal, holding the jewel out between his thumb and forefinger.

The old man glanced up, and was dazzled by the brilliancy of the jewel, a superb, clear-white diamond, larger than a robin's egg, and nearly as large as a small hen's egg, oval in shape, and cut so well that from every facet there leaped and danced a wonderful fire, that fairly made the jewel blaze in the torchlight.

"Yes—yes, that is it—that is it. Praise to all our divinities for their serene pleasure. Now may I set out upon my holy pilgrimage!"

The aged Egyptian lowered Cal to the floor, and throwing his arms around him, embraced him again and again; pressing many kisses upon both cheeks, as is the custom among eastern nations, until the poor fellow thought he would be devoured, and begged to be released.

"Retain the jewel till we get outside," said Ismail, leading the way hurriedly, for the torch was very nearly out. "If an unhallowed hand should clasp that jewel, death would be the punishment of the sacrilege. Fear not; the companion of a descendant of the Pharaohs is safe from all harm. Thy generous heart protects thee, and thy manly nature drives the evil one far away. I must not touch the jewel here, or the wrath of the gods will be visited upon me; but once in the outer air the prohibition is removed. Haste—haste!"

The young physician replaced the jewel in its casket and put the latter in a pocket by itself, hurrying after his conductor and leaving the rubbish as he had thrown it.

The torch soon went out completely, but Ismail knew the way thoroughly, and, bidding Cal keep hold of his flowing robes, he hurried along toward the entrance as fast as possible.

Neither of the two knew that the same shadowy form that had been watching them all along, and had seen their every motion, had shown the same excitement that Cal had at the sight of the jewels, and particularly the diamond, and had, when they started to return, hurried on ahead of them at a much more rapid pace.

At last the passages grow lighter and lighter, and soon Cal sees the light lying across the stone floor of the last passage, a low, narrow one, half choked with rubbish; and, dashing ahead of the old man, rushes forward with a great shout, and once more hails the all glorious sun.

At that instant there is a wild shout, a perfect whirlwind of dusky forms sweeps around him, and before he knows what has happened, the young man is caught up from the ground, bound, thrown upon a horse's back, and is galloping away among a horde of Bedouins, while the leader laughs harshly, and shouts back toward the pyramids:

"Ha-ha, Master Ismail, you self-styled demon, I have outwitted you!"

With an immense cloud of dust following them, the party of Arabs dashed off straight into the desert, leaving the pyramids, and the city, and civilization behind, and rushing madly into the trackless waste!

Ismail rushed out just too late to be of any assistance to Cal, whom he saw borne swiftly away by the shouting Arabs.

"Curses on him, it is the Sheik Hassan, my bitter enemy, and the boy has the jewel still in his possession. Curse the Bedouin! May the touch of the jewel paralyze him and pursue the thieves to the death. Ha-ha! Sheik Hassan! Beware the wrath of the Demon of the Desert!"

smaller every moment, the sands seeming to actually fly beneath the feet of the swift steeds, which, urged on by their wild riders to the very height of their speed, put mile upon mile behind them, never once stopping until high noon came around, and the blazing sun, standing almost above their heads, called the Arabs to a halt, in order that they might rest during the great heat of the day, which would be nearly unbearable in the afternoon, and after the evening shadows had begun to gather, again go on their tireless way across the desert.

All this time Cal had been strapped, face downward, to the back of a splendid animal, whose rein the Sheik Hassan himself held fastened around his left arm, guiding his own charger with one hand.

The young man could, of course, see nothing, the ground gliding beneath him so rapidly that he could scarcely distinguish the color of the reddish-brown sand, everything being blurred to his vision; and he was unable to tell whether the Demon, whose curse, ringing loud and clear upon the silent air, seemed still to haunt him, was in pursuit or not, or whether any villages or oases were in sight.

His position was a painful one at the best, and it grew momentarily more tiresome, until at last the poor fellow thought he should faint from very agony.

His lips grew hot and parched, and his throat burned like a furnace; his eyes became swollen and bloodshot, and ached, as if keen daggers were continually piercing them, while his heart throbbed and thumped against his ribs as though it would burst its confines, and send the seething blood in red gushes from his mouth and ears.

It was indeed a terrible ride to our hero, and when it was over and he was lifted from the horse and set upon his feet, it seemed hardly possible for him to stand; and had not the Sheik Hassan caught him in his arms, he must certainly have fallen senseless to the earth.

He fainted, as it was, and when again he became aware of what was going on around him, he found himself upon his back in a tent, while an Arab girl was bathing his temples and forehead with cold water, and offering him a drink of the same delicious fluid, which he quaffed at a single swallow, while his eyes expressed his fervent thanks.

"I am Zuleika, the daughter of Sheik Hassan," said the young girl, in passably English, "and you shall not take another such ride. We were in hot haste this morning, and had no time to change your position, or it would not have been so."

Cal pointed to his little medicine case, which he saw lying near him, and asked the maiden to bring it to him, saying that he wished to take something which would take away his pains.

She brought it to him, but then, seeming to be struck with a sudden thought, withheld it, saying in a tremulous voice:

"The young sahib will not take his own life?"

"By Jove! I had not thought of that," mused Cal to himself. "That would be one way out of my troubles, sure enough, though I should prefer to get rid of those dirty wretches instead, by the same process." Then addressing the girl, whom he thought singularly beautiful for an Arab, he assured her that such an idea had not entered his brain—that suicides were denied entrance into Paradise, and that he would never dare to give up his hopes for the future in that way; saying, in conclusion, that he merely desired to relieve his pain.

The young creature, reassured by this speech, gave him the medicine case, and Cal took one of his own prescriptions, feeling much better after it. Zuleika then gave him food, after which he fell into a deep sleep, from which he did not awake until the sun was low in the heavens and the Bedouins were beginning to make preparations for departure.

The young man walked out of his tent and gazed about him; but with the exception of three or four tents of the Arabs, who numbered some twenty souls in all, nothing was to be seen but the trackless desert, stretching before and behind, and on either side, as far as the eye could reach.

There was absolutely nothing to break the dreadful monotony of the scene, not a tree or bush nor a single elevation that could serve to break the dead level spread out on every hand.

Here and there were little ridges of sand baked almost as hard as the rock by the fiery rays of the sun, and occasionally there might be a depression of a foot or so; but at the distance of a few yards even, these resolved themselves into the general level appearance of the whole, and the view was anything but inspiring.

"And to think," mused Cal, half to himself, "that this barren waste, this arid stretch of burning sands extends right across the country to the Atlantic Ocean; twenty-eight hundred miles of parched, blazing desert, rainless and almost dewless, with nothing upon which to support life, no springs, no trees, nothing! And they say men have tried to cross it and have perished by the hundred, and their bones lie bleaching, year after

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE RIDE AND A STARTLING RECOGNITION—THE THREAT.

Away flew the Arabs, straight out into the desert, and soon the pyramids were left far behind, growing smaller and

year, in the fierce rays of the African sun, and no one to claim them! Oh, it is horrible—horrible! God save any man from such a fate! God forbid that such an end should be mine!”

The Arabs had by this time begun to strike their tents, and to pack them upon the backs of the camels, of which there were about half a dozen. These creatures were lying down with their hind legs extended, and when the very first load was put upon their backs, they would cry and groan, as if the burden were too hard to bear.

Their riders well knew their capacity, however, and gave them no more than they could well carry, and still travel at a high rate of speed; but the dromedary is a tricky beast, and seems almost endowed with intellect, so cunning is he, and nobody but an Arab can manage him.

At last everything was ready, and after a hasty meal, just as the sun was setting, the Arabs mounted their steeds, Cal being allowed to sit up, though fastened in his saddle, and to have the use of his arms, his horse being led, however, as before, by the Sheik Hassan.

The little cavalcade set out and Cal, who made good use of his eyes, saw that upon the backs of two of the camels, perched high in the air, there sat a veiled female figure, in front of each of which sat a man to direct the animal's course.

“Two ladies,” mused Cal; “does the sheik carry his wife as well as his daughter with him? Zuleika said nothing of this. What can it mean?”

Thinking was not an easy task at the rate of speed which was kept up, the pace being almost as rapid as in the morning, and Cal soon found that he must give all his attention to himself and his horse, so that he might not fall from the saddle.

One by one the stars came out and shone brilliantly in the cloudless sky, and presently Cal saw the group of three which had been pointed out to him the night before at the base of the Great Pyramid by the treacherous Frenchman; and the sight brought back to his mind the terrible incidents of that fearful night—the wanderings in the passages of the Pyramid, the meeting with the Demon of the Desert, and the recovery of the diamond, the White Sun of the Pharaohs, from its long resting place.

He mechanically put his hand upon the side pocket, where he had placed the gem, and felt the perfumed wood casket just where he had deposited it. Then he thrust his hand into the other pocket and discovered the loose gems and the priceless necklace still in their places.

“At least it was not robbery which moved these fellows to capture me,” thought the young physician. “What, then, can have been their motive?”

By and by the moon came up in splendor, and again the long shadows of the riders hurried away before them as they had done the previous night during that ride of a dozen miles to the Pyramids; and once more Cal's thoughts went back to that eventful evening, as he tried to fathom the purpose of St. Croix in leading him away from the city on a fool's errand, as he now knew it to be.

And then an idea darted through his brain so swiftly that he wondered at not having long ago thought of it, and he exclaimed aloud ere he knew what he was about.

“By Jove! the other woman on the camel is Laura herself!”

In an instant he recollected that he had spoken his thoughts aloud, an unwise thing to do at the best, particularly if one does not want his companions to know what he is thinking about; but upon this occasion an occurrence that was followed with a most striking result.

As the startling words sounded out upon the stillness, broken only by the patter of the horses' hoofs upon the gritty sand, every man turned toward the speaker, though but few could understand the tongue in which the words had been uttered, the sheik himself hissing a low warning in the same language.

The mischief had been done, however, if mischief it could be called, for a piercing shriek was heard before the echo of the words had died away, and one of the women, throwing off her long veil and looking around with arms extended toward the American, cried out, in joyful tones:

“Clarence—Clarence! You have come to save me! Thank heaven for this—thank heaven!”

One glance at the beautiful face of the speaker, bathed in the full light of the silver moon, was sufficient for Cal to recognize the beloved features of his betrothed, and he realized in a moment that his hastily uttered and inadvertent words had accomplished more than a whole day of spying and questioning could have done.

His sudden suspicions were fully verified, and what he had only dared hope, he found to be a startling reality. His affianced wife was a prisoner like himself.

“Laura, my own—my beloved!” he cried, in ecstasy, “I have found you at last, only to lose you!”

“Clarence, save me—save me!” responded the beautiful girl; but at the next moment her cries were stifled by the man on

the camel, who threw her veil over her face and prevented her from uttering another sound.

At the same moment Sheik Hassan drew rein, the whole party having that instant come to a halt, and, turning around, he placed the muzzle of a huge pistol against Cal's temple and commanded him upon pain of instant death not to address the white woman or even utter a sound unless addressed.

Cal was a brave fellow, and, thinking naught of the consequences, he dashed the sheik's weapon aside and said in defiant tones, which revealed his interpid spirit:

“Beware, Sheik Hassan, how you treat an American citizen, and remember, too, that the Demon of the Desert follows fast behind.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROMISE AND ITS CONDITION—A SURPRISE.

The effect of these threatening words was very marked, and Cal could see that the sheik turned pale and bit his thin lips with ill concealed rage. Then he curled his long mustache disdainfully, and, replacing his weapon in his broad sash, pushed his white turban back from his forehead, and said, slowly:

“You have spoken brave words, sahib, and many there be who would throw them back in your teeth. Sheik Hassan admires bravery and respects an undaunted heart; but for the future, be advised and say as little as possible. As for your being an American citizen, I care not that for any of your foreign infidel powers,” snapping his fingers, “and still less do I care for the impotent rage of a crazed old beggar who calls himself by the terrible name you have mentioned. I pity his disordered mind, but I laugh at his ravings!”

Sheik Hassan then commanded the party to proceed upon their journey, and once more the sands flew from beneath the feet of the steeds, and the long shadows chased each other ahead of their riders, while the moon rose higher and higher, making every object as distinct and clear as if shone upon by an electric spark.

Despite Sheik Hassan's bold assertions, Cal knew full well that his words had affected the Bedouin deeply, and not only him, but every member of the thieving horde; and the young man recalled every word of Ismail's frenzied warning as the Arabs had rushed away with their prizes, feeling sure that sooner or later he would see the mysterious old man once more, and maybe owe his deliverance to the Demon's agency.

Cal kept silence for the remainder of the night making up his mind to see Laura as soon as he could and plan their escape, if such a thing was possible. He was considerably cheered by the knowledge that she was in the party, and she in turn had her drooping spirits revived by knowing that Cal was near her, though she could not account for his presence in Egypt at a time when she had supposed he was thousands of miles away, and knew nothing of her abduction.

Soon after sunrise the little caravan halted, the camels were unloaded, tents pitched, men and animals partook of food, and Cal was led into the tent he had occupied the previous day, and bound hand and foot, though not in as painful a manner as before, but merely to prevent his leaving the tent.

After a little Zuleika came to him with refreshments, releasing him that he might eat, and from her he learned the particulars of the plots to abduct him. Laura had been allowed to believe that she would be rescued, and had been placed where he had seen her; but when he rushed up had been hurried away, the wily Arabs well knowing that he would follow. Then he was left in the Pyramid, and the women and some men, with the camels, were ordered to proceed a few miles and await the coming of Hassan.

The latter had seen Ismail, though unseen by him, and the sheik's intent was to have avenged himself upon the old man; but overhearing the story of the jewel, and having seen its recovery, he determined to secure that instead of molesting the Egyptian. Consequently, he had kept his men in waiting, and at a given signal, had pounced down upon Cal and carried him off.

“But what was the motive of the Frenchman in decoying me to the Pyramids?” he asked. “Did he want to get rid of me?”

“I cannot answer. I know nothing of his purpose. You will be released at the proper time.”

“There is some mystery here that I cannot fathom. You say I will be released. Shall I be sent back to Cairo?”

“Yes, or to some other place where you can rejoin your friends.”

“I will not go without the white maiden. I have come to take her away, and will not rest till my mission is accomplished.”

“That will be impossible.”

“Nothing that can be done is impossible to a Yankee boy,” said Cal, hotly. “I tell you the American woman must be re-

turned to her friends, and I am determined to do it, come what may!"

"The desert is like the sea, and the traveler upon its sands cannot find his way without a guide. As well try to reach a haven without a compass."

"How do you happen to be acquainted with ships and the sea—you, a child of the desert?"

"Some day I will tell you. You will abandon this wild plan?"

"Never! I shall make every effort to rescue the maiden."

The young girl's face flushed crimson, and her bosom heaved violently, while her breath came and went in gasps, her whole appearance denoting intense excitement.

"You love this white girl?" she asked, after a long pause, her voice arising scarce above a whisper.

"She is my affianced wife, and when we return to America, we'll be married."

Had a thunderbolt struck the Arab girl, she could not have been more astonished; and without a word she hurried from the tent, in order to conceal her emotion. She had fallen deeply in love with Cal, and with the intensity of all eastern races had resolved to brave every danger for his sake.

It was she who had planned his escape, intending to fly with him and leave her father and tribe, everything that was dear to her, for his sake; and now to be told that he loved another, and was betrothed to her, was more than her passionate nature could endure.

After she had gone, Cal pondered upon her strange conduct, but not the faintest suspicion of the real state of the case entered his head; and he was still thinking of how he should manage to see Laura, when the hangings of the tent were pushed aside, and Sheik Hassan entered.

"Listen to me, Christian dog!" growled the Bedouin, angrily, fixing his eyes upon Cal, while a heavy frown mantled his brow. "You have dared such things the past night that deserve death at my hands, but as I know——"

"If you are speaking to me, you dirty thief of the desert," returned Cal, defiantly, "you had better be more careful in your choice of language; for in my country, such words addressed to any man of spirit, would be instantly replied to by a blow. What have you to say to me? Don't waste words, the time is short."

"I have determined to release you, having no further use for you, and by the time you reach the abodes of civilization, I shall be so far away that it will be useless to attempt to follow me."

"Hear me, Sheik Hassan. I am in your power; your hirelings outnumber me, and it is useless for me to resist. You will listen to reason, though, I am sure. Release me and the white maiden, and give us a safe transport to the nearest city in Egypt, and not only will I promise that you shall go unpunished, but in addition will give you jewels worth more money than you ever saw or heard of in all your life."

"And these jewels, how shall I receive them? How do I know you will not betray me?" asked the wily fellow.

"Give me your word of honor upon the Koran, and upon your hopes of future bliss, that you will send the lady and myself safely to Cairo, or Alexandria, or any other city in Egypt you please, and the jewels shall be yours before we depart. You shall have them when you have sworn to do what I ask."

"How do you know I will keep my promise?"

"You dare not break it if you swear it by Allah!" returned Cal, impressively, while the sheik paled slightly, and bit his lip.

"I will swear nothing!" he said, folding his arms.

"I will give you a priceless diamond, the most sacred relic known to the Egyptians, the 'White Sun' of the Pharaohs!"

"You have that diamond? You will give it to me if I promise?" asked the other, eagerly, his swarthy countenance showing all too plainly his inborn avarice.

"It shall be yours when you have promised to do as I say," returned Cal, evasively.

"You have it here? you will let me see it?"

"When you promise."

"I will do so, then!" replied the Sheik Hassan, fiercely; "but, remember, my promise is void if you do not keep your part of the contract. I promise, and swear upon the Koran and by Allah, to give a safe deliverance and escort to you and the white girl provided you give me now, this moment, the precious jewel called the 'White Sun' of the Pharaohs!"

"Agreed! You have sworn it, and no Arab dare violate such an oath! Behold the jewel!"

Cal thrust his hand excitedly into the separate pocket where he had put the curious cubical casket, and drew it forth, opening it and taking out the silk and papyrus wrapping.

They crushed together in his hand into a flat mass without weight. The diamond was gone!

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMBAT—THE POISONED DAGGER—ZULEIKA'S GRATITUDE.

"Ha-ha! you cannot keep your word, and I will not keep mine," laughed Hassan, scornfully. "You are an idle boaster. Where are the precious jewels you promised me? You have them not!"

Cal thrust his hand into another pocket where the loose jewels and the leaden casket still unsealed had been put, but they too were missing.

It was incomprehensible to him, and he puzzled his brain in vain for the solution of the question.

The large diamond might have been taken from its box, and the latter restored to his pocket at the first onslaught of the Arabs, and very likely it had been; that was easy enough to account for, and he knew now, from Zuleika's story, that they had been aware of his possessing the jewels; but how the necklace and the loose gems could have been taken without his knowledge, passed his comprehension.

He had felt them in his pocket during the night, and had not been asleep since, so they could not have been taken from him at such a time.

At any rate, they were gone, and his scheme of bribing the wily sheik had failed.

"I might have known it would," he thought, "after what Zuleika told me."

Hassan seemed greatly to enjoy his discomfiture, and he laughed softly to himself for some minutes, while Cal strode angrily up and down the tent.

He had not been secured again after having partaken of his breakfast, and consequently his hands were free.

Annoyed exceedingly by Hassan's jeering manner, he made a quick movement as the Arab was passing him with folded arms, and snatched one of the daggers from his broad belt.

"Now, you cowardly thief!" he cried, "we are evenly matched! Protect yourself, for I mean to kill you if I can! You have broken faith with me, and you deserve death as a thief!"

"Take care, boy!" said the sheik, assuming a defensive attitude.

"Boy yourself, you villain! You are no man, but a miserable, thieving, Arab cur!"

"By Allah, you insult me to my very teeth!" cried the enraged Bedouin. "This is more than flesh can bear, and I renounce my care of you. Protect yourself."

He rushed at Cal furiously, but the young man was as spry and agile as a kitten, and he kept Hassan at a distance, while the keen blades flashed and glistened, every now and then clanking together, and sending out a shower of sparks.

Hassan had all he could do to prevent himself from being stabbed to the heart, Cal being a most excellent swordsman, and having a wrist of steel; he pressed his swarthy foe hard and fast until, but for an unlucky slip, he would have sent his keen dagger through Hassan's body.

As it was, he fell heavily, and his weapon flew from his grasp, and before he could recover it, Sheik Hassan was upon him like a whirlwind.

One swift stroke, and the knife would have been buried deep in a vital part, and poor Cal's history would have ended then and there; but at the critical moment a lithe form flew to his side and interposed itself between him and destruction, while one sinewy arm seized the dagger of Hassan and turned it aside.

It was Zuleika, who thus, at the peril of her own life, had interfered to save the young man from a terrible death.

The peril she underwent was greater than Cal was aware of.

The dagger of Hassan did not wound her deeply, the point entering her left arm near the shoulder, to the depth of about half an inch, causing the red blood to flow freely.

Cal did not know that the dagger was poisoned, and that without immediate aid the young Arab girl would quickly die.

Hassan knew it only too well, and he became terribly excited.

"The poison has entered her blood!" he cried, frantically, as Zuleika fell senseless upon the sand. "Save her by your healing art, young American, and I will be your friend through life. Forget my harshness to you and save my child. She loves thee, sahib, and shall be thine if she lives!"

Already, while Hassan was still speaking, Cal had bent over the unconscious form, and had bound a strip of linen tightly around the young girl's arm above the wound, so as to prevent the poison from being carried by the blood into the system.

The poison was a most deadly one, and he at once recognized it as vegetable and exceedingly rare, but he was well read up in toxicology and knew at once what to do.

First of all, without once thinking of the danger to himself, but only desiring to save the life of her who had saved

his, he sucked the poison from the wound, and then applied powerful remedies, for the case was a desperate one and must needs be treated so.

His medicine case was ransacked, and it being very complete, Cal was able to find what he wanted, and before long had the satisfaction of knowing that in all probability Zuleika would live, although she had been taken with a high fever and raved incessantly.

The day wore on, and Cal secured several hours of much needed sleep, his mental exhaustion after the thrilling events of the past few hours being as great as was his physical, and he slept till late in the afternoon.

He was then awakened by some one entering the tent and placing a hand upon his face.

He looked up and saw Zuleika.

"You here again?" he asked. "How do you feel now, better?"

"You have saved my life," she said, simply, "and my gratitude is yours. Your noble art shall never be forgotten."

"You risked your own life to save mine, and it was the one and only return that I could make."

"Listen; I loved you from the first moment I saw you, and vowed that you should return that love. When I knew that your heart had been given to another I was in despair and could have gone to my death without a sigh. I could not hate you, but felt so utterly miserable that death would have been welcome to me. You were the one beloved object in all my visions, and I cared for nothing else. When I saw your peril I thought not of self, but determined to save you!"

"But at what a risk!"

"'Twas nothing; but if it were, the game was worth it. You have not only restored me to life, and done that which will make the terrible Sheik Hassan your friend through good and ill, but you have taught me my duty."

"And that is?"

"I know that you, in your cold western climate, do not think it proper for a maiden to declare her love unasked. We of the east are of a different mold. We love and we hate with a fierce passion, and think it no harm to show our feelings. I have said I loved you! I do still; but it is an unselfish love, and no trace of jealousy can be found in it. What I would have sooner died than do once, I am now ready and anxious to perform."

"What is that?"

"To rescue you and your beloved from my father's wild associates, and to carry you back in safety to your friends."

"If you do that, there is nothing reasonable that I won't do for you," replied Cal, warmly. "Just give me a chance to get away from these dogs, and I'll warrant I'll find the road to the Pyramids. The stars will guide me."

"No—no; you could never go alone. You would die on the way, and your bones would mingle with the broiling sands, and the dear ones far away would look in vain for your return, and never know your fate."

"I have a stout heart, and with swift steeds the journey would not be long."

"You could never make it! The blinding sand-storm, the burning sirocco, the mirage, the wandering wind—these and a hundred perils would beset you! No—no; I will not let you go without guides. Your blood would be upon my head if I did."

"Do you wish to speak to your beloved? The guards before the tent are asleep, and I will guide you there if you desire it."

"And I wish it? I have long prayed that I might have the opportunity of once more embracing my beloved."

Zuleika quickly led the way to another tent, and in a few moments the lovers were clasped in a fond embrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEMON OF THE DESERT AGAIN APPEARS.

The sun had set for the second time since Cal's capture by the Bedouins, when the caravan once more moved out upon the desert, taking a course a little south of what it had been at first, and the young physician was buoyed up by the prospect of escape.

He could not distinguish Laura from Zuleika as they sat upon the camels, both being swathed in long robes and veils which did not even leave their eyes exposed, but Zuleika had told him that Laura would ride ahead of her, and so he kept his gaze fastened upon the foremost shrouded figure, and thought of the time when he should have restored his beloved to her fond brother, and resolved to take particular care that she was not carried off again.

The desert presented the same unbroken appearance, not a tree being in sight; and the reddish sand baked by the sun into hard ridges, and crumbling beneath the feet of the horses

and camels into an almost impalpable dust, which arose in clouds about them, and made breathing most difficult at times.

The heat was nothing like so unbearable as during the day, and in fact, as the hours passed by, the air became very cold, and thick blankets were absolutely necessary for even comparative comfort.

No springs or water of any kind had been met with since the start; but the Arabs were well supplied with this necessary liquid, two large skins being slung over the backs of each of the camels, and most of the horses carrying at least one.

These skins held about a dozen or twenty gallons apiece, and as the camels had taken copious draughts before starting out, there was no chance that they would require any more for twenty days at least; and food being plenty also, the prospect of suffering, upon those scores, at any rate, were small.

Cal comforted himself with the idea that the journey would not be one of long duration, on account of the number of horses in the troop; for he knew that these animals could not bear the discomforts of a journey through the desert nearly as well as camels, but he knew nothing of Hassan's plans, which knowledge would have considerably dampened his enthusiasm.

Zuleika had whispered to him just before setting out upon their night journey that before many hours she would find an opportunity of releasing him and the American girl, and provide them with trusty guides, who would take them safely to Cairo.

"The wondrous necklace, also, which is fit for a princess, shall be restored to you," she said, "that you may adorn your bride; but the other jewels are in my father's possession, and I fear he will not part with them."

"I care nothing for jewels," he returned, "so long as the most precious jewel of all, my beloved Laura, is restored to her sorrowing friends. As for the diamond, the Demon of the Desert will look out for that, and will not lightly part with it."

"Hush! do not speak of that terrible being. I tremble at his very name," replied Zuleika, with a shudder.

"What do you know of him?"

"Much; it is a long story, and some day you may hear it."

She would say no more, but hurried from the tent, which was soon after struck, and Cal did not see her again until she had mounted on a camel and the little procession moved on.

The hours passed, and still they were journeying steadily into the desert, and Cal was beginning to think that there would be no deliverance for him, when suddenly one of the Arabs gave utterance to a cry of astonishment, and pointed behind them to a singular appearance upon the horizon.

This was a bright light which danced up and down, now becoming quite faint, and then blazing up again in the most brilliant manner.

"'Tis the moon!" cried one, in Arabic.

"The moon?" said another. "Ah, dog, the moon never shines like that. That light is too small and too wavering for the moon."

The light danced and flashed and waved around in an extraordinary manner, seeming to come nearer and nearer, momentarily growing brighter and larger, and sending the Arabs out of their wits.

Cal could not make it out, and the Bedouins began to show signs of alarm, urging their steeds to greater speed.

Even Hassan felt an undefined dread which he could not overcome, though he strove to conceal it; but when, presently, the light appeared to be borne ahead by a strange, fantastic form, and uncouth sounds were heard accompanying its flickering, he swore by Allah that it was the devil himself pursuing them.

Nearer and nearer came the light, and the tramp of the strange figure could be distinctly heard, while the shouts and shrieks were redoubled in sound and rapidity, following one another in succession.

"It is the dread Sirocco in visible shape," said Ahmed, one of the Arabs, "the ill-omened devil who sends the blinding, burning sand that covers the traveler in a living grave!"

"It is Astarte, the fiend of the air, the malignant, beautiful devil who makes the delusive mirage to lure us on to destruction!" cried Hamet, another Arab, one of the youngest of the party, but a ferocious cut-throat, nevertheless. "Allah preserve us from his blighting hand!"

Swifter and swifter galloped the dread figure, whatever it was; nearer and nearer came the terrible presence, seeming, as it approached, to be a man mounted upon a camel, and waving a torch.

So it appeared to Cal, but the superstitious Arabs imagined it to be anything and everything that their wild fancy could imagine; and finally, as with a fierce shriek the figure dashed into their very midst, for swiftly as they were traveling it had gained upon them every instant, there was a flash and a report, and a bullet went whizzing close to Sheik Hassan's head.

"The Demon of the Desert!" they cried, with one accord, scattering like sheep in all directions.

The Demon of the Desert!

Had this mysterious being then fulfilled his promise, and was he on the track of the thieving Arabs?

Yes, it was he, indeed.

"Ha-ha, you may well tremble!" he shrieked, waving his torch. "Beware, Sheik Hassan, beware!" and holding a long barreled Egyptian gun in one hand, he fired another shot at the Bedouin chief, and springing from his camel laid about him vigorously.

Cal had been thrown from his horse at the first onslaught, and lay stunned upon the sand, while his steed galloped madly away, and for many minutes all was a blank.

When he came to himself, he found someone bathing his temples, and looking up, discovered his old acquaintance of the Pyramid, Ismail.

"Ha-ha! boy, I have rescued you at last!" said the old man, "and put the cowardly Bedouins to flight. The jewel—the White Sun of the Pharaohs—you have it? Give it to me!"

"Where is the white maiden?" asked Cal. "Is she free?"

"Yes—yes, she fell to the ground," returned the other, absently, "and lies not far away, stunned; she will soon recover. The jewel—where is it?" he continued, wildly. "Give it to me; its touch is death to every hand but mine, now!"

Cal seemed to hear nothing but that Laura was safe, and the Arabs dispersed; and springing to his feet, he gazed around wildly, endeavoring to discover where she was.

"Laura—Laura, where are you?" he shrieked in despair. "Speak to me, tell me you still live!"

Then seeing a form lying upon the sand at some little distance, upon which the first rays of the rising moon were shining, he darted forward.

Ismail seized him by the wrist, and prevented him from making more than one or two steps.

"The diamond! Give it to me!" he cried, fiercely, while his eyes fairly blazed with insane fury, increasing the impression Cal had already formed that the man was mad.

"I have it not. It was taken from me when I slept," answered Cal. "Let me go to my beloved."

"Lost!" shrieked the Egyptian, releasing his hold upon the young man. "By Osiris! I will scour the desert from the Pyramids to the ocean, and from Soudan to Barbary!" he continued with a wild burst of hysterical rage, "before I give it up!"

He shrieked, tore his hair, rent his garments, raved like a madman; but Cal saw nothing, heard nothing, so engrossed was he in the one absorbing desire to once again behold his idolized Laura.

Catching the inanimate form in his arms, he hastily tore aside the veil, and pressed kiss after kiss upon the cold face; then releasing her, he let the light of the moon fall upon her features.

Oh, agony! It was not Laura that he held in his enraptured grasp, but Zuleika, the Arab maiden!

"Lost—lost!" he groaned, as he comprehended the terrible mistake the Egyptian had made.

His grief-inspired cry was echoed by the old man, and together they shrieked in the very depth of despair:

"Lost—lost—lost!"

CHAPTER IX.

ALONE IN THE DESERT—THE DELUSION AND THE REALITY.

For a moment the aged Egyptian stood thus, buried in despair, and then with a wild cry of rage, he ran to where his camel was quietly standing in the very spot where his rider had dismounted, and bidding the animal kneel, Ismail mounted upon his back, and in a moment was speeding away over the desert.

He had no idea of the fate that awaited Cal, and the latter, who had been so much interested at the idea of being abandoned by the strange creature who had promised to aid him, that he deemed it must be only his folly, and that Ismail would soon return.

For some time he lay motionless, and the day passed on, but he could not get the thought of the return of the Egyptian, and Zuleika, out of his mind. He would not come back at all.

He was growing lighter now, and we can imagine how willing he was to follow. "Follow me, and I will show you some of my father's pearls," he said, at last.

He was now full of hope, and in a few moments he was on his feet, and looking around him.

"The day is now a true child of the desert, and you have in a corner of the world, and as strange as the desert itself, a man who will show you some of his father's pearls."

He was now full of hope, and in a few moments he was on his feet, and looking around him. He was now full of hope, and in a few moments he was on his feet, and looking around him.

one that carried them over considerable ground in the course of an hour.

The sun rose right out of the level sands, which seemed to glow in the light like molten metal, and by the time the huge orb was an hour high the night chill had been dispelled, and the air was just comfortably warm.

As it rose higher, and its rays shone more directly upon the lone travelers, the air became oppressive, and motion of the slightest kind was wearisome and exhausting; poor Cal thought that his limbs would fall from under him at every second.

They continued their weary march, however, while the air grew hotter and hotter, and the burning sands were a seething furnace, through which they marched and marched, the seemingly red-hot particles getting into Cal's shoes and torturing him horribly.

Higher and higher rose the sun, fiercer and fiercer grew the heat, and now the young man's throat was parched with thirst, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He could scarce speak above a whisper, but his eyes uttered most pathetically the one craving of his heart.

Water—water—water!

Oh, for a single drop of water!

And the great burning king of the heavens looked down and seemed to mock his agony.

Zuleika, too, seemed to be suffering from thirst, but not nearly as much as her companion, whom she encouraged to press on, and ere long they would reach some of the band who would give them drink.

"I know a well deep down in the sands, far—far below the reach of the sun's burning rays, where the water is as pure and cold as the ice from the mountains; the well was dug many hundreds of years ago, and has never yet run dry. It lies to the south of us, but is still a long way distant."

Cal groaned in agony; and suddenly thrusting his hand into his pocket, drew out the quaint necklace of carved gems, and holding it up before him, thus addressed it:

"Ha—ha! how you sparkle! You are worth thousands—thousands! And yet I would gladly, willingly part with you for one long draught of fresh, sparkling, life-giving water! Ha—ha!" he shrieked, in his delirium, "gold and precious jewels beyond price in my possession, and dying for a cup of water!"

He flung the jewels from him, and would have crushed the glittering treasure under his foot, had not the Arab girl snatched it hastily from the ground, where it lay shining and sparkling, and prevented him from injuring it.

"No—no," she said, excitedly. "Despise not the jewels, their time has not yet come; wait, and you will find them of use to you. They are yours, and my father shall not be called a thief. I have returned them all to you. Preserve and keep them; some day their value will appear!"

"Gold! jewels! what do I care for them?" laughed Cal, crowding the string of linked jewels back into his pocket; "it is water I want—pure, refreshing water; one drop were worth a hundred of the rarest gems ever seen!"

"Patience—patience, sahib, and we shall reach the well I have told thee of! Allah, have mercy on me!" she continued to herself, "for telling an untruth, for the well is not within a hundred miles of us."

"How can I be patient," gasped Cal, "when I am burning with thirst?"

On and on they went, across the horrible dead level of sand, with nothing in sight to cheer the eye or gladden the heart, when suddenly, with a wild shout that caused intense pain to his hot throat, Cal rushed forward.

"See—see! the waving palms and the gushing springs!" he cried, in wild ecstasy. "Look yonder where the graceful branches wave, and under their grateful shade sparkle fountains a rill of ice-cold water, refreshing, invigorating! Come—come!" and he seized his comrade by the hand.

"Alas! he sees nothing!" said Zuleika, bitterly. "The demon of the desert is all he sees!"

"If you will not come, I will go alone and drink my fill of the refreshing liquid!" he cried, fiercely, letting go of the maiden's hand. "Do you not see the tree tops? Do you not hear the plashing of the water?"

"I see nothing, hear nothing. There is no such thing as a cheerless desert that can bring comfort or refreshment."

"You are mad, raving! You can see nothing! You can hear nothing! I see the trees and hear the water, and you do not!"

He was now full of hope, and in a few moments he was on his feet, and looking around him. He was now full of hope, and in a few moments he was on his feet, and looking around him. He was now full of hope, and in a few moments he was on his feet, and looking around him.

"Oh, my God!" shrieked the poor fellow, "is everything a cheat, a lie, in this hideous desert? Is there no relief, and shall I die here, far from friends and alone, my bones to bleach in the scorching sun, and my friends to watch in vain for my return? No—no! I have been reserved for better things. Come, Zuleika, come!" he cried, "'twas but a delusion, a mockery, but surely there are trees and springs somewhere about; we are nowhere near the heart of the desert yet, and there must be water; surely there must be. Come!"

"Allah preserve him, his mind is wandering!" muttered the maiden, dragging herself sadly forward.

"There—there! Look! off there to the right!" he suddenly cried, about half an hour afterward. "I would swear that this is no delusion."

Zuleika looked, and her heart gave a great bound.

Was she, too, deceived?

Had her senses left her, as well as the poor, worn-out American?

Were those real trees she saw, or had her eyes, accustomed to all the sights of the desert, been blinded by the horrible mockery of the mirage?

"Allah forgive that I should lose my reason!" she muttered, devoutly; "and yet I dare not say those are trees. Oh, this suspense is terrible—terrible! Haste, sahib, before the blessed vision vanishes!"

"Ha-ha-ha! This time it will not vanish!" cried Cal, with a hoarse laugh, while his throat seemed to be burning and pierced with a myriad sharp points, and he quickly followed the Arab girl, who had gone on ahead of him some distance.

This time he saw the trees, and was positive there was no delusion. He knew it was no lie, no mockery, and urged on by his burning thirst, he sped quickly over the sand, the trees growing nearer at every step.

Suddenly, however, he plunged headlong upon the ground, not having noticed a considerable depression in the surface of the plain, and sitting up, he looked all about him.

The trees had disappeared from sight.

The Arab girl, too, was nowhere to be seen.

He was alone in the desert.

Alone with his delirium, his agony—alone, without a guide or compass, devoid of means to support life—utterly helpless.

He did not know that a few steps would bring him in sight of the trees again; he had no reasoning powers; he knew nothing but that the trees had disappeared, and that all around him was desolation!

"There is, then, no hope!" he sighed, and burying his head in his hands, he fell, in an unconscious mass, upon the broiling sands.

The next thing he knew, after a long period when all was blank, was that Zuleika was holding a cup to his lips, and that he was lying on his back under the shade of a palm tree, where the grass was green and slimy, and a little spring bubbled up from the moist earth.

CHAPTER X.

THE ATTACK AND THE RESCUE—SHEIK HASSAN'S RESOLVE.

This was no mockery, no delusion, but the blessed reality.

It was no dream, no fancy, but a palpable fact.

Here were trees and fruit, grass and water, food and drink, repose and refreshment.

The poor fellow drank deep of the cool and reviving liquid, and it seemed as if he could never be satisfied.

When he had drank all that Zuleika thought good for him, she gave him some dates to eat, after which, feeling very much refreshed, although weak and weary, he took one of his own pistols to induce sleep and strengthen his nerves, and lying out under the tree, was soon wrapped in slumber.

The little green patch in the ocean of sand was a little more than a hundred yards below the level, and was no more than a hundred yards in extent, a sort of miniature garden, which would be a matter of miles.

The spots are by no means frequent, and it was fortunate that the traveler should happen upon this one, which, though a narrow or sand-trail might be kept entirely out of his notice.

The spring was small, and the water seemed to gush up from the earth only to lose itself again; but some passing caravans had evidently appreciated its reviving qualities, and having a thought for others, had left a gourd on the green spot that others might drink as well as they.

Cal slept the while a kept watch over him, sitting on a branch above him on the branches, thus he could have all the more shade and coolness, and guarding him with his sword from every real or fancied danger which might threaten.

She loved him with all the ardor that her emotional nature was capable of, her passion being fierce and uncontrollable, and she was not the creature to brook any division of his love; he must give it all to her, as she gave him all hers, and woe to any rival who might step in between them.

And Laura Brentford, what of her?

Suppose by some chance she and the young American should again meet?

It was by no means improbable.

She had been carried away by Hassan and the others, and of course the sheik would search for his daughter.

With a furious gesture, but uttering not a word, lest she should awaken the object of her ardent passion, the Arab girl put the thought away from her, as one that would demand plenty of attention when the proper time came, but which must not be dwelt upon at the present.

She dared not think of it; so, dismissing it with a tremendous exertion of the will, she began chanting one of those wild songs of the desert, the weird and fascinating music of which is unheard of outside of the native wilds where it had birth.

The effect was rather soothing than otherwise, and Cal slept on calm and undisturbed, dreaming of her he loved, while this untamed desert child sang him to rest, and he all unconscious of the tornado of passion sweeping through her breast.

As she sat there, communing with her wild thoughts, she had not observed the approach of a number of Bedouins mounted on camels, who, seeing the trees and knowing there must be water near at hand, had turned their steps toward the spot.

They advanced cautiously, seeing the two sitting there so peacefully, and dismounting noiselessly, surrounded the little oasis, creeping swiftly nearer and nearer.

All at once there is a wild yell, a dozen swarthy forms rush upon the travelers, the shadowing mantle is torn down, and Cal is rudely awakened from his pleasant sleep, to behold a lot of Arab ruffians glaring at him with their evil eyes.

Two of them had seized Zuleika, and she was now struggling in their grasp, endeavoring to free herself from their grasp, but she ceased in her dress.

Cal sprang to his feet, and feeling that his strength had returned, flew at the two ruffians and sent them reeling to the ground by a stunning blow on the side of their heads.

This gave Zuleika time to get her weapon, which Cal saw was a large pistol, similar to the ones carried by Hassan.

"Stand back, you thieving dogs!" she cried, with flashing eyes, as the Arabs approached. "I know you, Sheik Ali, and you know Sheik Hassan! Beware of his wrath if you harm one hair of his daughter's head!"

As she stood there, with her raven hair flowing upon her shapely shoulders, her dark eyes sparkling and her lithe form tense and rigid, the right arm slightly raised and the left thrown back, she looked the very image of an amazon queen of the old days, when Babylon was in its glory and Semiramis ruled in might.

"We will not harm thee, maiden," said the foremost Arab, a villainous-looking creature, with a white turban, long flowing cloak, and a wide sash stuck full of knives and pistols, while a long gun was slung across his shoulder.

"You dare not!" hissed the girl.

"'Tis the Christian dog we want, and we must have him. He will be worth a large ransom," and Ali advanced as if to seize Cal.

Zuleika threw her left hand in front of the young man, and uttered a hasty warning to the Arab, taking aim at his head. He drew his sword and dashed forward to his doom.

There was a flash, a report, a puff of smoke, and Ali lay dead upon the sand, his blood mingling with the waters of the spring and dying them crimson.

As the Arab fell, Cal darted forward, whipped his body over, the man having fallen upon his face, and in an instant had possessed himself of the gun and pistols of the dead chief.

The rest of the party paused only for an instant after Ali's death, and then a rapid fire upon the two companions with cries and threats of vengeance.

Cal fired into the yelling horde and brought one of them down to the earth with a bullet in his brain, and then clubbed the gun, which used that way was a most formidable weapon, he swung it around his head and sent more than one howling Arab to grass with a pain in his head.

Seeing the determined resistance of the plucky pair, the Arabs hastily retreated, leaving their dead and wounded where they had fallen.

"They will return in greater numbers and take revenge upon us for what we have done," said Cal, reloading Ali's gun, "they maybe carry us off captive into the desert. Oh, that I could be free! the mere thought of it drives me mad!"

"When they return we will be far away, and they can find us. When the sun goes down and the stars shine brightly in the heavens we will pursue our journey."

"And lose our last hope of escape from death in this hideous place, the chance of being found by your father," said Cal in desperation.

"Stay here and you are lost!"

"But I remain and be seized by those murdering villains, than attempt to cross the desert alone. Here there is food and water, but there"—and he pointed to the desert—"there is nothing—absolutely nothing."

"You are mad to remain here. The Bedouins will return in large numbers, and we shall both be slain, for what chance do we have against such odds?"

"It is an even chance, then, for if we go out upon the desert we shall certainly perish. I prefer to take the chance of remaining here!"

"You await only your—"

"Ala! there's some disturbance out there on the desert now!" said Cal, interrupting the girl. "See, what do you make it out to be?" and he pointed out upon the plain toward where the Arabs had departed.

"I see a cloud of dust, and hear shouts and the report of firearms. I see a strong confusion and I find two parties of travelers are engaged in deadly combat!"

"Ali's band is one, but the other?"

"Now they scatter and flee in all directions, while the other band remains firm. Ah! see, they are approaching us; we shall be taken!"

"It matters not, for, at any rate, we shall fare better than if alone to our lives; and then we may come across a friend who will send us home or find your father."

"The dogs shall never take me alive!" said Zuleika, with clenched teeth. "I will kill myself first!"

She raised a glittering dagger which she had taken from one of the dead Arabs, and was about to sink it to the hilt in her throbbing bosom, when he seized her wrist and prevented the rash act.

"Stand!" he commanded, sternly; "that is not Ali's band returning!"

"Whose is it, then?"

"That of your father. Sheik Hassan. Can you not see that they outnumber the band of the dead robber?"

"Allah send it may be so!"

"It is so! Hurrah—hurrah!" shouted Cal, in the wildest excitement. "They have come to rescue us!"

In another moment the party dashed up and, the leaders dismounting, Cal recognized Sheik Hassan, Hamet, Ahmed, and the rest.

Hassan embraced his daughter, but the young physician saw nothing of Laura, and the party seemed to have grown in size, there being several women with it. The horses had been abandoned, and all were mounted upon camels.

"Where is she, my adored, my betrothed?" demanded Cal of the sheik. "Where is the white maiden?"

"In my power! Listen, sahib! That accused beggar, Ismail, is in pursuit with an army of devils. There is no going back now. Be my son, and live with us, for Zuleika loves thee. The white maiden shall suffer no harm for thy sake, and some day she will be returned to her people; but now!" and here he paused for a moment in order to give his words greater effect, "we are bound for the very heart of the desert!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE DIAMOND BEGINS TO SHOW ITS FATAL POWERS.

The very heart of the desert!

What a terrible picture those words conjured up! What scenes of suffering, of privation, and to many, perhaps to him, also, death!

Would he survive the fearful journey? Would Laura survive it, and if so, would there still be any hope of escape?

These thoughts passed rapidly through his mind, and then he answered Sheik Hassan calmly and quietly:

"Do with me as you will, so long as no harm comes to the maiden. I presume it is useless to ask you to turn back now."

"Yes; Ismail, so the runners tell me, has joined forces with the Egyptian soldiers, who think they can exterminate us. Bah! as well try to conquer the sirocco!"

"I would like to see the soldiers try it, at all events!" thought Cal, and then Hassan walked away to give some orders to his followers.

After resting for an hour or so longer, the party resumed their march westward, and soon the little green island in the sea of sand was left far behind, and faded from sight.

It lacked still an hour to sunset, but the air had cooled perceptibly, and was not as insufferably hot as during the day, and perched high up on the back of a two-humped camel, Cal felt very comfortable, although the riding was not as easy as upon horseback.

He could not distinguish Laura from the other women, and dared not say anything to attract her attention, knowing from Sheik Hassan's words that such a proceeding would stir up his anger, and feeling, from the glances bestowed upon him by the Arab girl whenever Laura's name was mentioned, that his jealousy, once aroused, would be bitter and might be the cause of much trouble.

All through the long night they rode rapidly, and many miles were put behind them, the rising sun beholding them still upon their way. In an hour or so the tents were pitched, Cal sharing that of the sheik and his daughter, and seeing nothing whatever of Laura.

At the usual hour in the afternoon the march was resumed, and three days later the caravan stopped at a little village on the borders of quite a large oasis, one of the most extensive and best known of these islands of the desert, a few hundred miles from Fazzan.

A stop of a day was made at this place, and then an onward southwesterly course was taken.

During all this time nothing had been seen or heard of the Desert Demon, and Cal thought he had abandoned his quest, not dreaming how soon he was to once more behold the formidable Egyptian, whom nothing seemed to daunt, and to whom obstacles, which would be insurmountable to most men, were mere trifles.

Cal had long since given up any idea of escaping with Laura, for Zuleika had evidently forgotten all about her presence and guarded him jealously, scarcely permitting him to be out of her sight an instant.

Hassan treated him with the utmost courtesy, and the other members of the band regarded him with much more favor than they had formerly done, seeming to look upon the American as a future member of their great family.

Cal began to pick up the Arabic language, though, of course, he met with many difficulties, that tongue being hardest to acquire of any of the Eastern languages, all of which present many obstacles to Europeans or their descendants.

A dreary week had glided by monotonously since the departure from the village, and Cal was tired beyond measure at beholding every day the same interminable stretch of dreary waste, the same broiling sun, the same swarthy faces, and never once the face of her he loved.

Water was still plenty, but provisions were giving out, and the camels did not supply as much milk as they had at first given, and, in fact, everything denoted that hard times were coming.

Dreary and drearier became the desert, less frequent and smaller in extent were the oases, hotter shone the sun, the nights being almost as unbearable as the days, on account of the intense cold, and weaker and weaker grew our young men as the days progressed.

Despair was eating away his heart, and he was ready to brave anything for one glance at the sweet countenance of Laura Brentford.

He offered to give Hassan all the precious jewels that had been strangely restored to him, with the exception of the diamond, if he would let him have just five minutes' conversation with Laura once a day; but Hassan only laughed, and said that the jewels could be his any time if he did but choose to take them.

Then, in a stern tone, he commanded the young man, upon pain of his severe displeasure, never to mention or even think of the white girl, for if he did, she would be put out of his reach entirely; the Bedouin even hinted that she might be made the means of forcing him to wed Zuleika ultimately, her death or freedom being the only alternative in case of refusal or acquiescence.

It was late in the afternoon succeeding this conversation, when the sky suddenly assumed a most threatening aspect, and the Arabs, with the most woeful alarm depicted on their faces, began to dismount in hot haste.

Cal wondered what was the matter, when Zuleika, throwing off her veil, called to him, in most earnest and pleading tones, to save himself ere it was too late, and to do like the rest or he would be lost; she followed up her persuasions by bringing her camel to the ground, and literally dragging him from its back. "See, see!" she screamed, "it is upon us! Lie down close beside the camels, so!"

The sky had become intensely red and angry, as if the heavens were ablaze or the end of the world had come.

"The sirocco—the sirocco!" yelled the Arabs.

"The sirocco!" cried Zuleika, pulling Cal to the earth, and making him lie flat upon his face, close against the camel which lay crouched in a heap, its head almost under its body, for in this position alone could they escape the terrible dangers of the dreaded sirocco which, in an instant, burst upon them in all its terrific force.

The whole horizon was instantly filled with sand which was fairly hurled upon them by the mighty power of the wind, the

sharp particles cutting the skin like needles if by chance any part of the person were exposed.

The very sun was obscured by the driving, blinding clouds of sand which swept over the plain, the air being as dark as night, and the heat most intense, and stifling, while the drifting sand, rapidly filling in all depressions, all space between men and camels, seemed to burn like living coals.

No one could breathe the air, so filled with sand was it, and the travelers kept their heads as close to the ground as possible, for the slightest inhalation of the sharp sand would cause the most exquisite pain, than which nothing more dreadful can be imagined.

Poor Cal choked and coughed and suffered the direst agony, the seconds seeming like minutes, and although the storm of wind and sand lasted less than five minutes, it seemed to him as if several hours had passed.

When the fury of the sirocco seemed to have abated, he lifted his head and looked over the back of the camel, the sight that met his gaze almost taking away his breath.

He could see nothing but the humps of the camels, everything else being buried in the hot sand, and many of the beasts being entirely covered up. Huge ridges and drifts of sand scattered here and there, showed him where lay some of his companions, and not far away was one unfortunate fellow who had not been able to get under shelter quick enough, and had been literally choked to death by the blinding, stifling sand.

It was Hamet, and he lay upon his back, his staring, inflamed eyeballs, partly clogged mouth and distorted features, showing the agony of his death, all presenting a picture of horror which haunted Cal for many a day.

"Poor fellow!" he said, rising to his feet and shaking the sand from his clothing; "he was nothing but a thieving Arab I know, but even he deserved a better fate than this."

He walked over to where the dead body lay, half covered with sand, the whirling drifts having formed a sort of ridge all around him, and preventing him from being buried entirely, and began lifting him from his burning grave.

As he did so, he noticed that one of the man's hands, the right, was closed tightly around some object which was clutched in a vise-like grip.

Cal was unobserved among the general bustle of scrambling from the sand-mounds on the part of the Arabs, and one look at the object in the dead man's hand caused his heart to leap into his mouth.

With a peculiar, dexterous motion, known to surgeons and physicians, Cal succeeded in quickly forcing the man's hand open, and in a moment the thing which had caused him so much excitement, fell into his own hand, which closed upon it instantly and hid it from sight.

"If its presence in impious hands does truly cause death, as has been said, how swiftly the penalty has been paid," mused Cal, gravely. "Rather was it the desire to possess it which caused this fellow's death, for had he thought of his safety instead of trying to steal this talisman, he would now be alive, and I would not have regained this marvelous stone!"

He had recovered the wonderful diamond of the Pyramid in the most unexpected manner.

The White Sun of the Pharaohs was again in his possession, and it had cost one man his life, the desire to possess it having been his ruin.

How many more lives would be sacrificed by it before it should be deposited in the temple?

This thought flashed through Cal's brain as he put the diamond in a small pocket next to his body, not daring to trust it anywhere else.

He knew that his own life would be forfeited if any of the Bedouins discovered it in his possession, and he was well aware that the Egyptian would not be deterred from shedding blood in order to regain it.

"I have it once more, and this time I swear I will not lightly part with it," said the young man, inwardly, "although I believe its possession brings danger or death to him who holds it. So it has proved thus far; whether it will continue to do so remains to be seen!"

In another instant Zuleika was at his side, her face beaming with love and admiration.

"You are safe, Allah be praised!"

"Yes, and the others?"

"Some are dead, suffocated by the frightful sand."

"And she—the one I—the white maiden, is she safe?"

"Yes," was the reply made, but the girl's eyes sparkled with jealous passion, and Cal saw that she wished the answer had been different.

The storm had so entirely changed the aspect of the desert and had so bewildered Hassan, that he dared not trust himself to proceed on his way until the stars shone out, and consequently a rest of several hours was taken, after which, when the night was well advanced, the march was resumed, Hassan being then able to determine his course by the stars.

Just as they were about to proceed, Zuleika seized Cal by the

sleeve and led him off into the darkness, where they were out of sight behind a group of camels.

"Listen, sahib!" she whispered, so that none but him could hear, "the precious diamond you know of is missing! My father is in a rage, and swears that the thief shall be punished with death if he is discovered."

"He was the first thief, to begin with," muttered Cal.

"Sh! If you know where it is or have it in your own possession, though I know you are no thief and have the best right to it, guard it well and breathe not a word to any one concerning it."

Then she hurried away, and Cal, buttoning his vest closely over the hidden pocket where lay the precious jewel, set his teeth, and said within himself:

"The White Sun of the Pharaohs is in my possession, and while I live, shall never be taken from me with my consent, nor by any common force until I restore it myself to its proper owner, the Demon of the Desert."

CHAPTER XII.

ATTACKED BY DEMONS—RETROSPECTIVE GLANCES.

The caravan started soon after this, and Cal had no opportunity of proving to Sheik Hassan that it would be useless for him to attempt to take the jewel from him.

Indeed, an exciting incident soon afterward occurred, which made him forget the diamond entirely.

Darkness had settled upon the desert, and there being no moon as yet, the only light was that of the stars which twinkled in myriads above their heads.

All at once the same mysterious dancing light they had seen on a previous occasion appeared upon the horizon, while a fiendish yell sounded on the air.

In an instant the light was seen to be accompanied by others, which danced and twinkled most erratically, coming nearer and nearer every moment.

There seemed to be at least a score of them, and the startled Bedouins urged their camels on at a more rapid pace.

Now the lights come nearer, and camels are discerned, upon whose backs are seated most strange and unearthly riders.

They seem to be men, but their bodies glow like living coals, their faces being as black as night, and in their hands they hold flaming spears, which emit a mysterious light, and seem to be on fire.

Leading this unearthly band is a tall, white-headed man, whose ragged locks and tangled beard give him a most fearful look.

He bestrides a camel and carries a cimeter, and from the soles of his sandals to the plume of his turban he appears to be one glowing mass of fire.

"Ha-ha! Beware of the wrath of the Sahara demon, the spirit of the simoon!" he shrieks, as he hurls his frightful band upon the Bedouins. "I am Ariel, the storm-fiend, and the fire of Heaven is in my hand! Ha! tremble, ye Bedouin dogs!"

"The Demon of the Desert!" scream the women in affright, while the whole party with one accord flies over the sand as if borne on the wings of the terrible simoon.

The black riders clothed in fire and headed by their horrid leader, rush furiously upon the Arabs and spare none that they can overtake, cutting down the luckless wretches, and slaughtering them mercilessly.

Faster and faster ride the Arabs, but they cannot shake off their fierce pursuers, and the report of firearms is soon heard, the flash of powder mingling with the clashing of steel, and many an Arab rolls from his lofty seat and falls lifeless upon the sand, where the relentless sun shall scorch his flesh and bleach his bones till they crumble into dust.

Though surrounded by the wild riders, Cal remained unharmed, not a creature of them offering him any injury, or molesting him in the slightest degree.

The Arabs scatter and flee away in all directions, hoping by this means to escape, and the Demon of the Desert, for he indeed it was who led this wild band, shouted out for his men to pursue only Sheik Hassan, and let the rest escape.

Cal's camel was then suddenly brought to a stop, and he was nearly thrown from his seat.

"Ismail, if you have a heart, save the white maiden!" called out the young man, as he saw the others hurrying off, and knew that Laura must be with them.

She heard his cry, and struggling heroically with the man who drove her camel, succeeded in throwing him to the ground, and bringing the beast to a halt.

At the same moment a woman, hotly pursued by two of the Demon's devil-like followers, sprang from her camel to the ground, and as they rushed upon her she shot both of them dead.

Then, with an angry shriek, she tore aside her veil, and revealing her beautiful features, called out to the young American to save her.

It was Zuleika, the daughter of the Sheik Hassan.

Cal was about to spring to her side, when three stalwart fellows, with black faces and garments that glittered like the folds of a serpent, descended from their camels, and rushed upon her.

At the same moment, Ismail, with a cry of rage, commanded them not to lay a single finger upon the Arab maiden under pain of arousing his fiercest anger.

On the instant, Cal had flown to Laura's assistance, and at a word from the weird creature who commanded these untamed beings, whatever they were, whether fiend or human, they left the young lovers alone and undecided.

"Thank Heaven! we are saved from that fiend, Sheik Hassan," said Laura, "though who this terrible creature is I know not."

"He is an Egyptian, and I am in doubt at times to know whether he is in his right mind or not. He saved me from perishing in the Pyramid that night after I caught a glimpse of you in the entrance."

"I thought you had come to rescue me from the Arabs, and my spirits rose to the highest pitch. Then I was hurried through the passages until when it seemed as if you were about to take me from them, the Arabs released a heavy stone over a doorway and barred your further progress."

"What I suffered that night surpasses telling, and but for Ismail I should have perished."

"The Arabs took me out through another passage they knew of and then out upon the desert, where we waited for Hassan."

"Tell me!" cried the young man suddenly, as the thought struck him, "did you know in Cairo a Frenchman, one Armand St. Croix?"

Laura turned pale and seemed deeply agitated, not being able to speak for a full minute.

"Yes, I knew him," she said, at length, tremulously. "He was a villain, an adventurer, and had the audacity to sue for my hand in marriage."

"Aha! now I begin to see light!"

"I refused him with scorn, for he is known in Cairo as an unprincipled rascal. Then he went to Gilbert, but of course met with no better success."

"No, I should think not."

"Then he told me that if I would not have him I should be another's, that he would have me carried off by the Arabs, and that I would rue the day when I scorned his love!"

"Did you say aught of this to Gilbert?"

"No, for I deemed it but an idle boast. The next day we visited the notable places in the vicinity, and during the following night I was carried off, but saw nothing of St. Croix."

"Did you see him after you left the Pyramid?"

"Yes; and he bitterly taunted me, saying that even then, if I would relent, he would rescue me, and we would go to France together."

"The scoundrel! If I ever meet him, I'll make him see more than three stars, I guess. He'll think the whole firmament has fallen on him!"

"I am sorry now that I did not mention his threat to Gilbert."

"So am I; but there is no help for it now."

"At that moment Ismail approached, and Cal saw that the fiery appearance of his clothing was due to phosphorus rubbed upon a loose mantle which he wore, and which he now threw off."

"Fear not, American," he said, in kindly tones; "though terrible to my foes, I never forget a friend. These followers of mine are Nubians; they will give you a safe convoy over the desert, and to-morrow, or on the following day, I will rejoin you."

"Whither go you?"

"To seek the traitor, Sheik Hassan, and avenge the wrongs of years."

"Thou art a heap of Egyptian carrion!" shrieked Zuleika, rushing forward with flaming eyes and hair streaming behind her, and holding the hair of Sheik Hassan's head, and thou art accursed! May the scorching sun and the scorching scorch the very marrow in thy bones! May the delusive mirage lure thee to destruction! May the—"

"Peace, girl!" cried Ismail, sternly. "Thou knowest not what thou art doing. Remain with the Americans, and one day thou shalt know me!"

"I know thee now, thou gibbering devil! I know thee to be the fiercest enemy to me and mine that ever lived. The Arab who can do this!"

"Peace, I say! I am indeed the bitter enemy of Sheik Hassan, and I will be known for the reason; but thine enemy I am not. Go with these good people and await my return."

Not stopping to hear an answer, the Demon walked rapidly away, giving utterance to a peculiar call, which soon brought the Nubians to his side.

Giving some directions to them concerning Cal and the two women, he mounted his camel and rode up to Cal, as if about to bid him adieu for the present.

"And we—which way do we go—toward Cairo?" asked the young man.

"Not so, my friend; but wherever you go be assured that you shall be safe."

Without further parley he gave the word to his camel, and steed and rider bounded off, being soon lost to sight in the gloom.

CHAPTER XIII.

ZULEIKA TELLS THE STORY OF HER LIFE.

"You will go with us?" asked Cal, of the Arabic maiden, as Ismail disappeared in the darkness, and the Nubians began to make preparations for continuing the journey.

"Alas! sahib, there remains naught else," she answered, sadly. "Father, friends—all torn from me! What else is there for me? The desert is barren; I cannot cross it alone. You are my only friend."

"Go with us, and I will be your sister—will love you for the many kind deeds done to my beloved," said Laura tenderly.

The girl seemed deeply affected, and as she stood wringing her hands, the tears flowing down her dark cheeks and her lips trembling, she seemed the very personification of grief.

"Why should you be so kind to me?" she said, huskily. "I would have stolen thy love from thee, and would have killed thee, hadst thou protested! Alas! I, too, had a lover once, but now—now I have nothing! Oh, my brave, my beautiful Selim! would to Heaven you were here!"

"And you will go with us?" asked Laura, again, in a voice full of tenderness.

"Yes; your path is mine now, your lodgings mine, your friends mine," and without further ado, she mounted her camel, Cal getting up in front of Laura, while his animal was led behind, and the strange party set out amid the darkness, the time of the moon's rising being yet two or three hours distant.

"Did I not tell you that some day I would relate the history of my strange life, and why I hate the very name of the Sahara demon?" Zuleika presently asked, as they rode on, side by side.

"You did," answered Cal.

"Shall I tell you my sad story now? 'Tis as fitting a time as any."

"We shall be pleased to hear you, if you feel inclined to speak," answered Laura, while Cal nodded his head in token of assent.

"Listen, then, to the story of Zobeide, now called Zuleika, and judge if my lot has not been a sad one, and if I have not cause to wish that the simoon might blast the traitor, Ismail, and that even my own bones might lie whitening on these arid sands!"

"Poor girl, I pity you," said Laura; and then, with a deep sigh, Zuleika, as we shall continue to call her, proceeded with her narrative:

"I can remember indistinctly a beautiful woman whom I called mother, but it seems sometimes as if my father were away at that time, for I have no recollection of seeing him until later. I seemed always to be traveling, now living in Cairo, and now somewhere else; once I know I took a long voyage upon the Mediterranean."

"I will pass over the first years of my life, which seem to me more like a troubled dream than anything else, and proceed to the time when I was fifteen years old. At that time my father lived in Mogodore, and was reputed to be wealthy, having large herds and owning many slaves. He did not roam from place to place then, as he does now, and I was as happy as a queen."

"Then he told me that enemies had begun to arise against him, among them an Egyptian called Ismail, once considered his best friend, who accused my father of all manner of crimes, called him a pirate and corsair, a thieving Arab, and a murderer. Little by little my father's goods passed out of his hands, and he told me that this Ismail had set the Sultan against him and had his property confiscated."

"Matters grew worse, till finally I was threatened that if I did not marry Murad, a creature of this Egyptian's, I would be carried away into captivity. I loved Selim, a brave soldier and a true lover, and vowed never to forsake him; but my father told me to hide my love, or ill fortune would overtake me. He was powerless now, he said, against the Egyptian,

THE DEMON OF THE DESERT.

formed a picturesque background, danced gracefully, now singly, now in twos, threes and fives, keeping up all the time a weird chant, not at all unmusical and unlike anything Cal had ever heard.

Then the whole number joined intermixedly in a sort of march, the music growing louder and louder, until it amounted to a perfect uproar.

Then, of a sudden, torches were brought in, each man holding one, while the dancing-girls produced a number of long ribbons which they formed into a kind of gay tent, one dancer, standing in the center upon the shoulders of two huge blacks, holding one end of all the ribbons in her hands, while the others, poised gracefully in a circle about her, held the other ends.

Then there was a crash of cymbals, a wild intermingling of torches, bright colors, men, women, black and white faces, and then at a signal the whole whirling crowd flew away as if driven by the wind, and the hall was deserted.

After this there were many wonderful exhibitions of juggling, knife-throwing, balancing and posturing, the like of which Cal had never seen, although he had traveled much and witnessed many wonderful things.

One man in particular, a gigantic Nubian, showed great dexterity of legerdemain which were simply astounding. Rushing suddenly up to Cal, he seemed to thrust his hand into the young man's pocket and take out a number of birds which he set loose, also a large quantity of many-colored ribbons which he whirled about like so many serpents, he standing in the middle; and lastly, three torches all blazing, which he swung around his head and then suddenly swallowed, or at least, appeared to do so.

All this occupied less time than it takes to describe it, and Cal was completely bewildered by the man's astounding performances.

The Nubian quickly disappeared after this last feat and no more was seen of him. Then followed many more strange exhibitions, the whole prolonging the fete to a late hour, the moon sending her silvery rays through the huge fissures in the old walls before Said advanced, and expressing the hope that the strangers had been pleased, informed them that the entertainment was at a close.

They were then conducted to their tents, Cal feeling very much fatigued, and solacing himself with a smoke from a long Arabic pipe before throwing himself upon his couch.

He divested himself of his coat and vest, and then, animated by some strange impulse, looked to see if the wonderful diamond which had already been the cause of many remarkable adventures, and was destined to go through still more wonderful ones, was still in its place.

He put his hand in the secret pocket where he had deposited the gem, the casket having been left in his coat, and his breath almost left his body at finding it empty.

The White Sun of the Pharaohs had again been stolen!

Cal was staggered, as he thought that it was impossible for anyone to take the jewel from its hiding-place without his knowledge.

When had it been done, and by whom?

The answer came like a clap of thunder.

The Nubian had stolen the diamond during his last exhibition of magic.

At that moment he was, Cal ran out at once into the enclosure in the middle of the tents, coming suddenly upon the prostrate body of a huge Nubian, lying upon his back, his face distorted with suffering, and a keen dagger thrust to the hilt in his breast.

"The thief has been swiftly overtaken by that fatality which comes to possessors of this wonderful stone," murmured Cal. "Wonder if he still has it in his possession?"

He recognized the dead man as the one who had pretended to take the various incongruous things out of his pockets, and, leaning over him, searched for the jewel, but without success.

Suddenly looking up, he saw an Arab crouching on the ground in the shadow of a tent, and divining at once that this man had stolen the jewel, he sprang upon him unarmed, as he was, and throwing him upon his back, seized him by the throat.

"Give up the sacred diadem of a race of kings, or meet the death your crimes merit!" said Cal, in Arabic, tightening his grip upon the thief's throat.

The man gasped, grew black in the face, and then pointing to his belt, groaned for mercy.

The American quickly thrust one hand into the place designated, and drew out the diamond.

Then holding it up to the light, and releasing the Arab, he commanded the man to arise and depart, with one furious gesture, at the same time saying in impressive tones:

"Beware! all men against touching this relic of past glory! Its presence in unhalloved hands is death!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE OASIS IS ATTACKED, AND CAL MADE PRISONER—MURAD THE DARK.

Cal replaced the diamond whence it had been stolen, resolving to take even better care of it in the future than he had done in the past, and then seeing no one stirring, the half-choked Arab having slunk away out of sight, the young physician returned to his tent, first satisfying himself that Laura was perfectly comfortable.

The morning had scarcely dawned, when Cal heard a frightful noise outside, and before he could jump up to see what was the matter, the whole tent came tumbling about his ears, burying him beneath its folds.

He struggled to get out, but he was so entangled that he could scarcely move, and every effort was painful.

He could hardly breathe, for, in addition to the close texture of the material composing the tent, it was so extremely dirty and dusty that the poor fellow coughed and sneezed and felt as if he should choke.

He had nothing by which he could cut his way out, and as for crawling under, he hardly knew which way to crawl, so mixed up was everything.

He shouted for help, hoping that somebody would come and release him from his most disagreeable position.

He could still hear the noise, as of a conflict, and wondered if the people of the oasis had been attacked by some wandering tribe, who envied them their lot.

Suddenly he saw the sharp blade of a cimeter penetrating through the tent cloth, and coming rather too near him for comfort.

He squirmed away, but the weapon was thrust in deeper and deeper, and then began to move from side to side, as if whoever held it was determined to kill him.

He shouted for the man to be a little more careful, but at that moment the cimeter was dropped through, and fell upon his leg.

Picking it up, he cut away the tent, and soon made a hole large enough to crawl through.

As he emerged from his strange place of imprisonment, the sharp weapon still in his hand, he saw Said, the Nubian, not far away, securely bound, while two or three ferocious-looking Bedouins surrounded him.

Near the young man himself was another Arab, who laughed heartily as he made his appearance through the tent.

"By Allah, 'tis a merry sight," he said, in Arabic. "Think not I meant to harm you, sahib, for that was not my intention."

"Who are you—the leader of this marauding band?" for Cal could now see many strange Arabs standing about, while the Nubians seemed to have been all killed except Said and one or two others, while the Arabs had been driven away or taken.

"I lead these dauntless riders, if that is what you wish to say, but fear not for yourself. I will not suffer you to be harmed."

"And the women—those who were in yonder tent—what has become of them?"

"The white woman and her Arab attendant?"

"Yes."

"The white woman will be useless to us. She has gone off with Abdul Ahmed to feed swine and bear burdens."

"And the other, monster—what have you done with Zobeide?"

"With Zobeide, the reputed daughter of Sheik Hassan?"

"The same."

"And she was the attendant of the white woman?"

"Yes."

"By Allah! she must not escape!" and away dashed the Arab before Cal could call after him.

He scrambled out and jumped to the ground, swinging his cimeter right and left, thus clearing a path for himself through the opposing Arabs.

He saw that the attacking party had been a large one, and that many of the inhabitants had been slain, the fight having evidently been a fierce one.

Rushing after the Arab, Cal soon came upon a scene that made his very blood boil.

Laura was struggling in the hands of two brawny Bedouins!

"Release that young lady, you heathen dogs!" shouted Cal, rushing upon them with such terrible impetuosity as to completely sever the head of the nearest one from his body.

The other man released his hold upon Laura and attacked Cal furiously, at the same time shouting to his comrades to come to his assistance.

Cal was an excellent swordsman, as we have already stated, and had he been opposed to one antagonist only, there could have been no doubt as to his being victorious, but in another

moment he found himself fighting two Arabs instead of one, and big fellows they were, too.

Swift as lightning he parried blows from both men at once, and occasionally succeeded in getting in a thrust at one or the other of his foes, though he was kept pretty busy defending himself.

At length another Arab rushed up and attacked him, and then another, but not one of the four could manage to bring him down, or even wound him.

They rushed upon him from all sides, but he seemed to be facing four ways at once, and parried the blows showered upon him with the quickness of thought.

Suddenly his cimeter blade snapped short off at the guard, and the poor fellow was left without a weapon.

His case looked hopeless, and the four Arabs uttered a yell of triumph as they beheld his mishap.

With horrid cries they rushed upon him, thinking to annihilate him at once.

They had not reckoned upon the devotion of a true-hearted American girl.

Swift as the wind, Laura ran to her lover's side, and put into his hand the sword of the dead Arab, which she had taken, together with his pistols while the fight was in progress.

"Ha-ha! you wolves of the desert—you dogs of Sahara!" yelled Cal, growing excited. "Come on, a hundred of you! What is one American? Come on, you cut-throats! Aha! take that, you bouncing Bedouin and bounce out of this!"

The man did, indeed, bounce away, having had the whole side of his face laid open by a slashing blow from the young physician.

Another lost his right ear, and a third got a thrust between his ribs that let in the daylight, and made him an utterly useless Arab, except as the principal requisite for a funeral, being as dead as a man ever was.

Cal lost his cimeter, however, and seemed to be in as desperate a strait as he had been before, when Laura showed that she could do in the way of repelling an attack.

As the two remaining Arabs rushed upon the young man, she fired away at them, and brought down two of the wretches, with bullets in their brains.

"Beware how you injure this maiden!" cried Cal, throwing himself in front of her as other Arabs rushed up, "for she is under the protection of the terrible Demon of the Desert."

On mention of this dreaded being the Arabs paused as if turning away in terror as if the demon himself had stood in their midst.

"It may be the demon himself in the guise of this brave young man," said one; "he fights better than anyone I ever met. Take care how we offend him."

"No Arab ever fought with such desperation; he cannot be slain. He must be the fiend of the whirlwind in person."

"Well, that was a lucky thought, at all events," mused one of the Arabs went off, leaving him alone. "It was a fortunate thing, my dear, that I happened to think of my Egyptian friend at that moment."

"His name seems to strike terror," answered Laura, "and I have myself seen what his actual presence can do."

"I wonder if he succeeded in overtaking Hassan. It is some time he reappeared, for if we ever needed him we do now."

"Those strangers will take us deeper into the desert."

"Yes, no doubt. Here, dearest, those jewels will be safer in your hands than in mine, I guess," he continued, handing her a small bag and the wondrous necklace of carved jewels.

"What an exquisite necklace!"

"That is yours, though I intended it for a wedding present."

"It is fit for a queen."

"Here, be careful with this gem," he said, handing her the red diamond, carefully wrapped up; "don't lose it on any account. That's all, except the little casket, and that don't concern much. I'll keep it myself."

The messenger had scarcely been made, when the leader of the Arabs, who had hastened after Zuleika, suddenly appeared, a frown on his brow.

"You have done bravely, American," he said, "and the golden girl shall not be harmed; but I would I had known Zuleika had been in the camp when I attacked it. She would never have escaped me. She is my promised bride, and I would give anything to have her in my power."

"Are you a friend of her father's?"

"Oh, yes; I am his friend, of course. Ha-ha! he daren't call me his enemy!" laughed the other, speaking in Arabic, which Cal now spoke well; and it may be understood hereafter when conversations take place between Cal and the Arabs, other than Hassan's daughter, that the language of the desert is the one used.

"Why did you attack the camp?"

"To obtain food, water, captives and treasure. You will not be harmed, but you must accompany me."

"You did not find the Arab maiden?"

"No; another band which accompanied mine carried her away. Had I known she was here, I would not have let her escape."

"You love her?"

"What matters it? I am determined to possess her, and shall follow the other party, and purchase her from them."

"How are you called?"

"Murad el Khall (or dark Murad); you know me—you have heard of me?" continued the Arab, as he saw a look of surprise come into Cal's face, the young man having remembered Zuleika's story.

"I have heard of you, but you were thought to be dead. That affray with Selim in Mogodore was thought—"

"Curse the fair-haired hound!" hissed the other. "'Twas a bad blow he gave me, and for months I hovered between life and death. I will give him its match when I meet him, if he still lives."

"Do you know that Ismail, your reputed friend, is shortly expected here, and that these are his friends?"

"The Sahara devil! He is expected?"

"Yes; he was in pursuit of Hassan."

"By Allah! then let Hassan beware, if Ismail gets upon his track! Mount and away with us, Sahib, for stirring times are before us. Ho! Abdallah, Ibrahim, Suliman, are all ready?"

"Yes."

"Then away with us, for the Sahara demon is abroad, bent on destruction!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DEMON AGAIN—AN UNFORTUNATE MISHAP.

The party numbered nearly a hundred souls, and as they dashed away, the dust they raised utterly obscured the camp behind them.

Mile after mile was briskly traversed, and the day was well advanced before they came to a halt.

No trace of the other party had yet been seen, but Murad knew in what direction it had gone, and he was determined to overtake it before night.

The heat had grown so intense that it would have been madness to travel further at any rate of speed, the burning rays of the sun seeming to turn the sand beneath their feet into a very furnace.

Ordering the larger part of the caravan to pitch their tents, the black-visaged Arab took a dozen of his best warriors with him, and pushed on in pursuit of Abdul Ahmed, who had not taken Laura, as he supposed, but the Arab maiden.

Committing the two Americans to the care of his men, and warning them to do no injury to the captives, Murad continued his pursuit, after telling his men to await his return.

It was night before anything was heard from him, and then a man came riding back in hot haste, saying that Murad's little party had come in contact with a much larger band of Bedouins, and that he had been captured and the rest slain.

The messenger himself had barely escaped with his life, and had ridden back as fast as he was able, in order to tell the news, and to bring assistance to the chief.

The Arabs at once struck their tents, and began a rapid march, which lasted all night, but in the morning they were no nearer than when they started.

Cal saw heaps upon heaps of the whitening bones of men and animals, and for several hours these ghastly relics formed a perfect trail, which the party followed as though it had been a highroad.

They stopped at an ancient well, dug deep into the sand, with steps leading down to it, so that the camels could drink, and after the men and beasts had been well supplied, the water being none of the best, a halt was taken until night should again set in, and make traveling practicable.

Another night march was made, the day being used for rest, and still no signs of Murad or the loose Arabs, and murmurings began to arise against Ibrahim, the man who had returned with the news of Murad's defeat.

"You have misled us," said the men; "you are in league with Abdul Ahmed; you do not desire us to rescue our leader."

"Lying hounds! I tell you it was not Abdul Ahmed's party at all that we met, but another. He, too, had been driven away."

"And the maiden?"

"I saw her not. I am no false guide, but they have out-ridden us. Their camels were fresh, and ours are jaded."

"You are no true Bedouin, Ibrahim, or you would have perished with the brave Murad."

"Then lie still, fool! Fortune is against us, and will be so long

as we keep this American with us. We must kill him, and carry the woman into captivity, or sell her to whoever we first find."

Cal heard these words, and stepping forward, replied, hotly:

"May the wrath of the Sahara demon pursue you, if you harm one hair of her head! May the sirocco blast you! May your bones wither—"

"Seize the infidel! Silence him!" cried Ibrahim; and before Cal could offer any resistance he was thrown down, bound, gagged, and carried away to a tent, while Laura was put under a heavy guard in another.

"We will make captives of them both," said Ibrahim, who had assumed the leadership of the party, "and we will see if the boasted power of this fiend will suffice to protect them."

The night had already set in, and still Cal heard no signs of moving, and began to think that there was to be no further progress made that day, when he suddenly saw a long, sinuous arm part the hangings of the tent.

Two Arabs sat inside asleep, but they made no sound as the form of a man crept swiftly in.

The light was so dim that Cal could not make out whose form it was, and he was about to move when the intruder made a warning gesture.

With a sudden blow that seemed to descend with the rapidity and force of a thunderbolt, the robed figure buried a gleaming knife into one of the Arabs, and as the other moved uneasily and opened his eyes, he, too, was struck down before he could utter a sound.

Who was the unknown assassin, who thus, shrouded in darkness, plied his bloody trade?

Cal trembled, for he knew not if he would be the next victim of this desperate being, whoever he was.

Who was he, indeed?

The question unuttered, but expressed, notwithstanding, by Cal's eyes, was soon answered.

The man advanced rapidly, and pausing before the young man, threw aside his cloak.

The Demon of the Desert stood revealed.

This terrible being had again come to the rescue of the man who had done him a kindness.

It all seemed so startling that Cal could scarcely draw his breath, but gazed with supreme surprise upon the weird, unearthly figure standing before him.

How had Ismail eluded the vigilance of the Arab guards?

How had he succeeded in approaching the encampment without being discovered?

These were questions which immediately presented themselves.

Ismail reached down, cut the cords that bound Cal's limbs, and then set him upon his feet, supporting him for a moment, as the young American was scarcely able to stand.

He had lain so long in one position, and the cords had been bound so closely about him, that when he was set free he was so stiff and sore that Ismail had to hold him up to prevent his falling.

The Egyptian took the gag from Cal's mouth, and then said, cautiously:

"Sh! the jewel. Have you it?"

"It is safe," whispered Cal, "but I have been in many dangers upon its account."

"Ha! there must be peril when one has such a treasure in charge. It is safe now, though, and I shall at last take it into my hands."

"Yes. How did you enter unperceived?"

"Sh! Some one approaches!"

Gliding swiftly toward the door of the tent, the demon reached it just as a huge Arab, probably hearing a noise and suspecting that all was not right, pushed aside the hangings and entered.

One swift, sure blow of the glittering steel, and the man lay dead in a pool of his own blood, by the side of his companions, whose heads he had just had time to notice.

Then the vengeful Egyptian hurried back to Cal.

"My American!" he whispered. "My camel is dead. I expected you were here, and I entered the camp. More than one guard sleeps his last sleep in this tent."

"That is why the march has been so long delayed."

"A score of the filthy robbers have felt the keen avenging knife!"

"And did not wonder that the Arabs dreaded this singular creature."

"I have seen the Demon of the Desert," he said. "I have seen the Demon of the Desert, and I have seen the Demon of the Desert."

"What is the name of the Demon of the Desert?"

"The name of the Demon of the Desert is the name of the Demon of the Desert."

terrible work!" whispered our hero, suddenly, suspicious noises being heard without.

"Stay—one moment! We must return for the Arab girl; she whom you call Zuleika."

"Zuleika!" said Cal, in surprise. "She was captured by another band at the time of the attack upon the Nubians, and carried away in an opposite direction."

"By Osiris!" shrieked the Egyptian; "are all my plans to go for naught? Must I never regain her?"

He cried aloud in his agony, forgetting his former caution, and in another instant half a dozen Arabs rushed into the tent with cimeters flashing.

Recognizing their dread foe in a moment, they rushed upon him, calling loudly for aid, but Ismail, seizing Cal by the hand and dragging the youth after him, made his way through his enemies, cutting right and left with his deadly blade, and soon reached the outer air.

"Haste—haste!" he cried, still pulling his companion after him, his age seeming to make his step none the less firm and swift.

"They are coming from all sides," said Cal. "There is no escape!"

"I will baffle them yet," answered the other. "Flight is the only thing left at this moment. One step further, and we are safe."

He bounded past the last line of tents, and, uttering a peculiar cry, sprang toward his camel, pulling Cal after him.

He mounted, placing our hero upon the seat in front of him, spoke to the beast, who quickly arose to his full height, and then urging him ahead, rode skiftly out into the desert, as the howling Arabs came swarming out of their camp with horrible cries of rage.

"Come on, accursed dogs of a degenerate race!" shrieked Ismail, looking back and shaking his fist. "He rides well who overtakes the Demon of the Desert!"

"Stay—stay!" cried Cal, in the greatest excitement. "We must return!"

"Return? Impossible!"

"But we must!"

"Why, boy?" asked the demon, still urging his steed onward.

"The white maiden—my betrothed—has been left behind in the Arab camp!"

"The American woman? She whom you looked for in the Pyramid?"

"The same."

"I thought her to be the Arab girl—Zuleika. I found her in her tent, and whispered her to have courage—that I would soon deliver her from her captors."

"She is my betrothed. You will not abandon her? Save her for my sake!"

"All in good time, boy—all in good time. No harm shall come to her."

"But there must be no delay! She must be saved at once, for your sake as well as mine."

Cal's excited manner and impressive words so moved the old Egyptian that he came to a halt, being already far in advance of the yelling Arabs.

"What can you mean, boy?" he questioned. "For my sake, speak! What mean you?"

"The diamond, the White Sun of the Pharaohs—"

"Yes—yes; what of it?"

"The young woman has it in her possession!"

"Destruction! You said it was safe!"

"I gave it to her for better keeping. Had I retained it, I should have lost it, for the robbers deprived me of everything I had; hat, coat, medicine-case, everything!"

"Tis a desperate venture, lad, but I would risk everything to recover that jewel!"

"You will return?"

"Yes, and do thee a good turn at the same time I regain the priceless jewel so long sought, so deeply prized!"

"It has been a dear prize, indeed, to more than one," said Cal, drily, "for nearly all who have sought to deprive us have lost their lives."

Another word Ismail turned his camel, and bidding his companion keep a good hold, rushed swiftly back to the Arab campment.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DEMON OF THE DESERT.

THE DEMON OF THE DESERT.

THE DEMON OF THE DESERT.

left her tent, having not even time to warn Laura of her danger.

That branch of the party which had seized her left the main body at once, and struck off into the desert in a southwesterly direction.

Before many hours, as we have already seen, the party was met by another and routed, and such of Murad's men as had endeavored to rescue her were also defeated, one man alone remaining to tell the tale of their discomfiture.

Zuleika was still a prisoner, but something about the leader of the party who had taken her from Abdul Ahmed struck her as being familiar, and she endeavored to reach him.

The Arab, thinking she intended to escape, laid rude hands upon her, and prevented her from advancing.

In a few moments the leader turned, and she caught a full view of his form and face.

He was, unlike the rest, of a fair complexion, with silken locks of gold falling upon his shoulders and over his high, white forehead. His eyes were blue, and had a look of inexpressible tenderness, although at times they could emit a glance as fierce as an eagle's.

One look at his face and form sent the hot blood mounting to the girl's temples.

"Selim—Selim! My own—my beloved!" she cried, striving to break away from the detaining Arabs.

The man turned quickly toward the maiden, with eyes flashing fire, and form quivering.

"Who calls?" he cried.

"'Tis I—your own Zobeide! Save me, my own love—my adored!"

He was at her side in a moment, and bade his followers release her.

He gave but one glance at the beautiful being, and then clasped her to him in a long embrace.

"Zobeide! my long lost, dearly beloved Zobeide!" he cried, in rapture. "Once more do I behold thee, whom I have mourned as dead. Never more shall we be parted!"

"Never, my Selim, never! You alone art truly beloved. No other ties shall bind me, no other life shall lure me but that thou leadest."

"And Hassan, the false one, where is he? Lives he yet, the traitor?"

"Speak not thus, Selim, he is my father."

"He is not. He is a false friend who has stolen thee from mine own devoted parent, and tried to instil a hatred in your breast toward one whom thou shouldest love."

"My father lives?"

"He does."

"Where is he?"

"I know not."

"You know him?"

"Yes."

"What is his name?"

"I cannot tell thee."

"Wherefore?"

"Do not ask me now. In time you shall know all, but the hour is not yet come."

"You will take me to him?"

"I will try. We must make a halt now, for the sun is hot, and the fierce wind threatens to sweep o'er the desert, blighting all it touches."

"Do as you will, Selim. My fate is linked to yours. There is no other power but thine, and I will follow thee whither thou wilt lead me."

"Who are they?"

"A white youth and maiden, Americans. They have been taken from me, and I would not see them perish."

"Where are they now?"

"They were in the camp when it was attacked."

"Then they are in the power of Murad the dark."

"Murad! Lives he yet?"

"Ay, but only until I can meet him. Some of his hirelings wanted to take you from me. Let the dog beware, for I am upon his track, and will follow him up to the very den."

* * * * *

As the camp, built in the very heart of the desert, was empty, the Egyptian, waving his hand over his shoulder, and shouting out in hoarse tones:

"Beware the storm fiend, beware the spirit of the sirocco, the spirit of the Desert!"

The long strides the camel bore his two riders toward the cing Arabs, who paused for a moment, horror-struck, and then, with a sudden impulse of fear which they could not resist, scattered in all directions.

As the swift speed, usually so sure-footed, stumbled at the falling body at his feet, and fell heavily to his

back, and striking upon his head, felt a pain shoot through him, saw a myriad of dancing lights

flashing before his eyes, and then lost all knowledge of surrounding things.

He knew not if Ismail had gone on in search of Laura, or whether he had been killed, for all was a blank.

For any good he could do his betrothed or the Egyptian, he might have been dead.

Meanwhile Ismail hastened on, shooting at such Arabs as came within range, and pursuing those whom he could see had carried away the American girl, all the while shouting out his terrible warning.

Cal was awakened by hearing a confused sound of voices, and opening his eyes, saw a number of savage Arabs standing around him.

The darkness had gone, the sun being half an hour high, and its heat already beginning to be oppressive.

Seizing him rudely by the arm, one of the Arabs forced him to arise, after which he delivered a hasty order to those about him.

Before the young man could resist, the human cormorants had sprung upon him, deprived him of his boots, hat and nearly every article of clothing, bound his hands behind him, put a rope around his neck, and had fastened this to the headstall of one of the camels.

Then, with a few hasty words, the party mounted and rode off.

Poor Cal! this was the hardest blow that had yet befallen him.

Deprived of her he loved best, far from his home, snatched away from even those strange friends he had made in that wild land, robbed, despoiled of everything, treated as a slave, and compelled to walk barefooted upon the scorching sands, his lot was indeed a hard one.

The pace he was obliged to keep up was far beyond his strength, considering the place and circumstances, and more than once he thought he should fall exhausted.

At these times the cruel spears of the Arabs would pierce his flesh, goading him on to renewed exertions, forcing him to keep up with the camel, or be dragged along the gritty, burning sands.

Covered with blood, sweat and dust from head to foot; sore with his wounds, and the exertion, unable to save himself, should he fall, his hands being fastened behind him; his was a sorry plight, indeed, and only the providence of God preserved him from death.

At last the heat became too intense for even the Arabs to endure, and they called a halt, pitched their tents, and prepared a simple meal, after which they would sleep until evening.

The unfortunate young man was given a small quantity of camel's milk, a few ounces of a thick pudding made of ground corn and water boiled together, and beside this a very small quantity to drink.

As far as food was concerned, he fared as well as the Arabs, who seemed to think the repast a sumptuous one, but in the matter of a couch he was not so well provided.

A rough, hairy blanket, which scratched and irritated his skin, was thrown to him, and he was told to wrap himself up, and go to sleep.

The night being cold, the Arabs lit fires, but Cal was not permitted to come near them, and suffered as much from cold as he had from the heat previously.

The next day the party, who were travelers with their wives and children going to London, rested nearly all day, and Cal had a chance to get over his exhaustion somewhat.

A woman, an ugly old hag, who looked nearly a hundred years of age, took pity on our hero's forlorn condition, washed and bandaged his feet, applied healing oils to his wounds, gave him the skin of some animal to wrap himself in, and supplied him with an extra quantity of milk.

Being able to speak Arabic, Cal got along better than he would otherwise have done, and his promises of reward, in case he should be carried to his friends, seemed to have great weight with the old woman.

The next time they started out she made the young man sit on her camel, and though, in his semi-nude condition, the position was anything but pleasant, it was luxury compared with running over the hot sand and sharp stones of the desert.

Day followed day, and though Cal became weak and feverish, and, in spite of the old woman's kindness, was in a frightfully inflamed and parboiled condition, the thought of ultimate rescue kept him from sinking utterly, and buoyed his drooping spirits.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AGAIN WITH FRIENDS.

"This thing must end!" said Cal to himself one evening; "were it not for Laura I would welcome death with pleasure."

Hard fare, very little water, no comfort; I will stand it no longer!"

The allowance of water had been growing smaller and smaller, and all but one of the female camels were dry, so that their supply of milk was also short.

The Arab chief grew more cruel every day, and once he beat the old woman for showing Cal a kindness, upon which the young man resolved to punish the brute at the first opportunity offered.

On this particular evening, he had crawled into the old woman's tent undiscovered, when he suddenly came across his coat tied up in a bundle.

He appropriated it forthwith, and found that the little oblong casket, sealed with sheet lead, still remained in one of the pockets.

Seeing a knife belonging to the old woman lying near, he snatched it up, and, going just outside the tent, tore the lead from the package.

Inside was a small box with a sliding lid, which Cal withdrew and discovered a fine white powder.

Taking some of this in his hand he carefully examined it, smelling it and rubbing a pinch between his fingers.

"By Jove, the very thing!" he said; "who would have thought the old Egyptians were toxicologists? There isn't a more deadly poison known to the profession; if I don't give those wretches a dose, then I don't know myself!"

Putting on his coat and securing the box in his pocket, he crept to a tent where some of the women had laid out the evening meal preparatory to calling the chief and his men.

He made a tremendous outcry at one side of the tent, and then, when the women ran out to see what the trouble was, slipped under, and thickly dusting the food with the powder, made his way out again unnoticed.

He then ran hastily to the old woman's tent, and finding her about to go out, seized her by the hand and looked at her impressively.

"Eat no food to-night, except what you prepare yourself!" he said; "there is death in it. Let none of the women and children eat, either."

"What mean you, sahib?" she asked, alarmed at his wild looks.

"Ask me not, mother; Allah forbid that I should do you any harm, but the sheik! His hours are numbered!"

"Tis well, no one will mourn. I have known the time, before my spirit was broken, when I would have killed him in return for an angry look, but now——"

She paused, for at that very instant the robber strode angrily into the tent, and seeing Cal, burst out into curses against him.

"Idle hound, Christian dog!" he hissed; "get ye gone to your work; you are worth less than the salt you eat! I marvel I have not killed you before now!"

"Insolent Arab, know you not that I am under the dread protection of the Desert Demon? Beware how you treat me, for I will have a terrible vengeance!"

The enraged Arab rushed upon him with his drawn cimeter, and would have struck him to the earth, had not the old woman rushed in between them and received the blow intended for Cal.

She was not badly wounded, though she fell to the earth, but fixing her glassy eyes upon the villain, pointing one skinny finger at him, she said:

"For this, Abdallah, you are doomed! You shall never see the light of another day!"

With a curse parting his lips, the man struck Cal savagely, felling him to the earth unconscious, and rushed from the tent.

Cal awoke to find himself stretched out upon the sands, the moon shining in his face, and the old woman bending over him.

"The doom has fallen, sahib, and the wicked Abdallah has passed on to meet his dead master, Ablitz" (Satan).

"And the rest?"

"Dead!"

"But not the women or children; they have not suffered?"

"No; but they have left, bearing away the corpses; surely, it was a terrible revenge!"

"And have my sufferings been nothing, woman? Should I endure all this and say nothing, do nothing to requite it? The vengeance of Allah has fallen upon them. I was but the instrument."

"I murmur not, sahib. It was indeed just. Where got you the powder?"

"From the Sahara Demon himself."

"You know him?"

"I do. Would he were here. You have a camel?"

"Yes; and one for you, besides. Your raiment also I have secured. Can you travel? Are you strong enough?"

"My will is strong enough now to urge me on."

"Then we must away. Stop! this ring; it was yours; I have saved it for you."

"Thanks, mother," said Cal, taking the ring and putting it upon his finger. "I have been told that some day it might prove a benefit to me. Let us hope it may."

"It has done so, sahib. But for that you would have received no kindness at my hands. Well do I know it, and well do I remember he who gave it thee!"

"Ismail Ben Abdul Said?"

"So he is called. I knew him by another name, in the years that have passed."

"What was it?"

"I am not permitted to say. In him you have a powerful friend."

"Why has he deserted me?"

"For a good reason, doubtless. See, the queen of the night rises high in the heavens. Away—away!"

Cal resumed his long unused clothing, and drawing on his boots, which greatly pained his swollen and inflamed feet, mounted his camel and rode off, the old woman leading the way upon her own beast.

Through the night they rode, and Cal could soon see the three stars far behind him, which St. Croix had pointed out to him upon that fatal night.

What memories they recalled, what emotions, what bitter feelings of revenge!

"And yet, had I not accompanied the false guide," he mused, as he rode along, "I might never have seen Laura, never have met the Demon of the Desert, never have had in my hand that wonderful gem, the 'White Sun.' Ah, what adventures that diamond has led me into!"

On and on, over the sandy wastes, with nothing to break the dead level, no travelers in sight, naught but the moon and the cloudless sky to gaze upon, their long shadows ever fleeing before them, rode the strangely assorted pair in silence.

Two hours passed, and Cal was wondering what the old woman could be thinking about, when she drew rein and waited for him to come up.

"What chance brought you into knowing the Sahara Demon?" she asked, abruptly, as they rode along together.

Cal told of their first meeting, of that frightful night in the pyramid, and of the subsequent appearance of the terrible creature, whose very name seemed to cause alarm.

"Ha-ha! they say his mind wanders," she said, "and well might it, for much has he suffered. Ah, I am an old woman and the desert is wide. I shall never see him again."

"You have known him well in past years?"

"We were playmates! That circlet of gold was put upon his finger by my own hand! Guard it well, for there is a blessing on it!"

"Let me give it back to you, you have a better right to it."

"No—no; keep it, sahib, keep it since he gave it. He well knew that it would serve you some day. Keep it; it may lead you to him; would it might!"

"You long to see him," said Cal, excitedly; "you are keeping back something! You could tell a strange story, if you would."

"Yes."

"You gave this ring to the old Egyptian?"

"I did, and swore to love him."

"You are an Arab, and the Arabs and the Egyptians do not love each other."

"No."

"He said himself that he hated the Bedquins, and that all Arabs feared him. Why did you also swear to love him?"

"Because," and the withered old woman drew herself up proudly, "because I was his wife!"

"You?"

"Yes."

"This is all so strange I know not what to think," answered the young man, thoughtfully. "The wild tales of the Arabian Nights are but nonsense compared with what I have heard."

"He has told you of me?"

"No."

"He thinks me dead! Many a time have I wished to die, but now, I would not die until I had again seen him and renewed those vows made so many years ago."

Nothing more was said, the march being kept up until after sunrise. The sun came up hot and scorching, and before long the heat became unbearable.

There was no shelter, no water, nothing to allay their suffering, and Cal was about to give up in despair, when the old woman pointed to a long, moving line far ahead of them.

"A caravan!" she said. "There is hope for us yet. The God of the Egyptians does not desert you."

"A caravan?"

"Surely! They will be halting before long; let us hasten."

Although much fatigued, Cal urged his steed forward to keep pace with his guide, and he soon had the unspeakable pleasure of seeing that the caravan had indeed come to a halt,

and that tents were being pitched, and all the preparations making for an extended rest.

Over the shifting sands gained the caravan the feeling to feel, with their riders, that rest and refreshment were at hand.

As they drew nearer they could see that the caravan was a large one, and finally, as they reached the tents, a single rider appeared and soon reached them.

"What seek you?" he asked.

"Food and rest," said Cal, dismounting, sinking exhausted upon the sand at the next moment.

The man jumped down and raised the poor fellow up, holding one hand in his own.

"I know that ring," he said, with great emotion. "Where did you get it?"

"From the Demon of the Desert."

"Then welcome, for you are among friends. Zobeide has told me of you. I am Selim, long mourned as dead, but now restored. Come, eat, drink, and take the rest you so much need. You are with friends who will not let you suffer!"

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT THE STARS BROUGHT ABOUT.

It was a long time before Cal recovered sufficiently to be able to tell his adventures, or even discover whether or not Laura was in the caravan, having been thrown into a raging fever soon after his rescue by Selim.

Zuleika attended to his every want, and nursed him through his sickness with the most utter faithfulness, which came of her gratitude to him for having saved her life.

At last the young man was able to speak, and the first question he asked was concerning Laura. He was told that neither she nor Ismail had yet appeared.

He did not stop to think that it was not the most likely thing in the world for the Egyptian to find him in so many miles of desert, but burst out into complaining, because Laura had not been rescued before and brought to where he was.

He was very much annoyed, too, because Selim persisted in pushing on across the desert; and he told Zuleika that he should the man ought to wait until Ismail should have a chance to come up.

"The desert is not the place to sit down quietly and wait, as you would do in a walled city," answered the Arab girl. "God alone knows whether we shall ever live to cross, travel we ever so fast. There are a hundred dangers to be feared and guarded against, anyone of which, coming upon us with full force, would soon end our journey. We must make all the haste we can, and trust to this Egyptian's own skill, to enable him to find us."

"Think you he will?" asked Cal, nervously.

"He will try; he knows the desert well, and will do all in his power to bring your beloved again to you."

Cal tried to be patient, but as the days passed by, and there came no signs of Laura or the demon, he grew discouraged.

Selim told him that they must be about two thousand miles from Cairo, and they could either push on to the sea, or strike down toward Timbuctoo, where they were most likely to find Ismail, his mission taking him there, and that eventually they must meet him.

The old woman, who was called Zemilla, strongly opposed this latter plan, and declared that the journey to the sea was the shortest, and most feasible.

Urged to give her reason, she refused for a long time to do so, saying that she was convinced of the truth of what she said, and that if they directed their course elsewhere than toward the sea, or due west, as she called it, having a very indistinct idea of the ocean, they would have cause to repent it.

Taking Cal aside one night, she pointed up to the starlit sky and said:

"Look up, sahib; what do you see toward the west?"

"A cluster of bright stars."

"In the form of a pyramid?"

"Yes."

"Which way does it point?"

"The longest point is toward the west."

"How many bright stars are there in the group?"

"Particularly bright, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Three."

"Which one of these points toward the sea—your desert of waters, as you call it?"

"The very brightest of all."

"True; there is a lesson in that cluster of stars."

"A lesson?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"The brightest star of all represents the one you love. The others are yourself and Ismail, both led on by the bright star ahead. The recovery of your adored is now your only aim in life. Her star points toward the sea. Travel there, and you will meet her; do not, and you will miss her."

"But Ismail is going to Timbuctoo."

"I care not. I tell you the stars announce to me beyond dispute that our course is straight to the sea."

"Prove to me that such a course is best, and I will take it."

"I will—watch!"

Zemilla raised her hands toward the heavens, stretching her arms out above her head, and uttering some strange, unintelligible sounds.

Then she suddenly exclaimed, in Arabic:

"Give me a sign, spirit of the air, beautiful Ariel, show me a token that this youth may know I speak true."

Suddenly, as she spoke, a brilliant meteor flashed in mid-air, and sweeping through the sky, leaving a long, fiery train behind it, fell to the earth, or disappeared from sight.

Its course had been toward the west.

"Behold!" cried Zemilla; "do you believe me now?"

"Whether I do or not, I shall journey westward!"

"Enough! You have faith in what I say!"

When the march was resumed, it was toward the ocean.

On the second day afterward, a large caravan was observed coming from the north.

They seemed in hot haste, rushing on with flying banners.

"It is a war party," said Selim, as they came nearer.

"And see!" cried Zeleika, in terror. "That blood-red pennant which leads the column is the sign by which Sheik Hassan makes known his presence."

"Sheik Hassan!" cried Cal.

"Yes."

"Then let him look to his life!" answered Selim.

Then addressing his men, he commanded them to form as skirmish line, in order to repel an attack if one should be made.

On came the wild horde, the dust hovering in a thick cloud above their heads, through which shone the red pennant of Hassan.

Selim's men, with guns cocked and ready, stood firm, awaiting the shock, never uttering a sound, but determined to wipe out the thieving band that was speeding down upon them, or lose their own lives.

"Yield—yield, thou fair-skinned cur!" shouted Hassan himself, drawing his cimeter, and rushing upon Selim.

"Never!" and two bright blades flashed in the sunlight.

They clashed and clinked, and sent out showers of sparks; swifter than lightning were the motions of the combatants; firm as iron was Selim's wrist, keen was his glance, and flushed was his cheek, while Hassan fought with the utmost desperation.

Cal singled out a dark-looking villain, who seemed to be next in command to Hassan, and intercepted him as he was making his way toward Selim.

The man blustered and cursed and threatened, but all to no purpose, for Cal's arm was strong, and his wrist like the tempered steel, and the Arab was hard pressed.

Suddenly he broke away, and rushed full tilt upon Selim.

The latter turned as he approached, and, with a smile of triumph, met the onslaught, turning the dark man's first blow aside with the greatest ease.

"Ha-ha, false Murad!" cried Selim; "I have longed for this meeting; once you escaped me, but now I shall finish my work."

"Effeminate brat, make your peace with Heaven, for I mean to leave your bones to whiten on the sands!" cried Murad, while Hassan joined him in the attack.

Cal had work for Hassan to do, however, and spurring on his horse, attacked the shield with such vigor that the Belban had never been in such imminent peril of losing his life.

He was forced to take the defensive, and step by step he retreated beyond the line of combatants, who were still engaged hand-to-hand, the shouts and shrieks and piteous shouts flowing with what fierce passions they were animated.

Suddenly there was a tremulous clatter, and the combatants around Cal saw Selim without an opponent.

In one hand held aloft, was the head of Murad, while the other held a gleaming cimeter, still reeking with blood.

"Behold the fate of the false-hearted rascal!" he cried.

"Death to Hassan and his tribe! Drive the wolves into the desert!" was the cry that went up from Selim's band, and with a roar and a rush, they swept headlong upon Hassan and Cal, driving both before them.

Presently a cloud of dust was seen approaching from an opposite quarter.

"The sandstorm!" cried the women, falling upon their knees.

"No—no; 'tis a troop coming to the aid of Hassan!" cried one of Selim's men.

Nearer came the cloud, and then in its midst could be seen the glitter of armor, and in the very front rank, clad in a coat of mail that shone like the sun, was Ismail Ben Abdul Said, the Demon of the Desert himself.

"God be praised!" cried Selim. "Now shall this robber Hassan, this despoiler of homes, meet the just fate that he has so long escaped!"

On came the strange being with his band, a veritable army, clad in shining mail, with long spears, unerring guns and keen daggers, their armor glistening and pennants flying.

The demon was the foremost figure of all, and close behind him rode a most beautiful youth, fair of face and slender of limb, wearing a shirt of mail that shone like silver, in his hand a shining cimeter, and over his flowing locks a turban of gold cloth surmounted by a scarlet plume.

Ismail himself wore the Egyptian head-dress, and among its heavy folds, standing out in full prominence, sparkling and shimmering in strange contrast to the swarthy skin of its possessor, shone the precious diamond, the White Sun of the Pharaohs.

"Now, by the glory of Pharaoh!" cried Ismail, "cut the Bedouin dogs to pieces!"

CHAPTER XX.

GILBERT BRENTFORD OBTAINS A CLEW.

It is about time for us to return to Gilbert Brentford, the brother of Laura, whom we left in Cairo after Cal's sudden disappearance.

Gilbert inquired for Cal after dinner, not seeing him around, and was told that he had gone out and would not be back until late.

He thought it rather singular that his old chum, on the very night of his arrival, should go away without saying where he was going or telling him anything about it, particularly as there were plans to be made regarding the expedition the next day.

He strolled listlessly about the hotel smoking and thinking, and never doubting that Cal would return at some time during the night, prepared to sit up for him.

Stretching himself at nearly full length in a comfortable chair, with a long pipe and a fan, an interesting book, a brilliant lamp, the latter suspended over his head, Gilbert made himself easy and began to sit up for his chum.

The pipe was smoked out twice with long intervals between; the book lost its interest by not lasting long enough; the lamp had grown dim, and Gilbert himself felt very tired, and still no Cal.

Gilbert looked at his watch; it had stopped at a few minutes past twelve, but he knew he had heard the great clock down the street strike several times since he last looked at his watch, which had then said eleven.

"It's very odd. He must be going to make a night of it. Why didn't he tell a fellow?"

He lit a cigar, scraped up another light, took a newspaper, and was ready for another waiting spell.

For the sake of comfort he loosened his cravat, kicked off his slippers, and stretched himself out in his chair with his feet on a low stool.

The cigar fell from his fingers, dropped into a spittoon, and he fell out, and Gilbert was sound asleep, while poor Cal was wandering about in the mysterious passages of the great Pyramids.

When he awoke the lamp had gone out, the sun was shining brightly through the window, and the noise of bustle through the house convinced him that another day was well upon its way.

He looked at his little clock on the shelf he was surprised to find it was after ten o'clock.

Very much to his regret his old friend was being hurried over to the desert by the cruel Bedouins.

He was very much provoked that he should have slept so long, and that he should have been so late in getting down to the office to find Cal.

He had seen him that morning, and the night clerk had told him the only thing to do was to go to Cal's room.

He went, and knocked upon the door.

There was no answer.

He knocked again with the same result.

He opened the door, and walked into the room.

He had not been disturbed.

He had not been home at all that night.

Very odd. I wonder what ails the boy. How strange it is that he did not say anything to me about it.

His former man was lying on a chair, half open, and the

young man's other baggage was thrown confusedly about, just as he had left it in his excitement.

On the floor, near the dressing-table, was something white, which Gilbert picked up.

It was an envelope addressed to his friend.

"Aha! a note marked 'private.' That's what has taken him away. What could it have been? Who would write to him? He knows nobody here."

The young diplomat walked up and down, and presently brushed aside the draperies of the dressing-table.

A crumpled piece of paper was revealed.

He picked it up, smoothed it out, and glanced hastily at it.

It was the note that Cal had received the night before, and which had been the means of taking him off to the Pyramids.

"I see it all. The poor boy has been decoyed to the Pyramids, and there murdered by the Arabs."

Then he paced up and down for a few moments, absorbed in thought.

"Who could have written this letter?" he mused. "Someone who wanted him put out of the way. But why? What motive could they have had?"

He thought again, but could come to no explanation of the mystery; he felt completely baffled.

"If he had known anyone here, I might imagine that someone was jealous of him, and wished to put him out of the way, so as to possess Laura for himself."

"If that were so," continued the young man, "then someone besides the Arabs have been engaged in this business, and the Sheik Hassan was but a tool."

He examined the note once more, and then discovered the three stars in the place of the signature.

"I have a clew," he muttered. "There is a man here who pretends to be an astrologer; claims to be able to reveal the future; and to tell, by the aid of planets, all that one wishes to know. I will go to him."

First, however, he had his breakfast, and then lighting a cigar, walked out into the office.

He observed a shabby-genteel sort of personage standing near the desk, and something in the man's manner struck him as familiar.

In a moment the man's identity came to him.

It was the shabby-looking European he had seen in the cafe the day before.

"That man knows something of this case, or I am very much mistaken," thought Brentford. "I must try him."

Seeing an acquaintance not far off, Gilbert walked over to him and said, in quite a loud tone of voice:

"Has the expedition against the Sheik Hassan started out yet?"

"Yes, it went early this morning."

"I am sorry about that; I meant to have gone with it myself, but a friend whom I expected did not turn up, and I could not go without him."

Gilbert turned suddenly, after uttering these words, and saw a diabolical smile cross the face of the shabby man.

The fellow did not observe that he was watching, and he rubbed his thin, sallow hands in glee.

Then he looked about him, saw Gilbert gazing at him, and walked quickly out into the street.

"I'll bet that fellow knows more than he cares to tell, but if I get it out of him, then I am out in my calculations."

Not very long after that, Gilbert knocked at the door of the astrologer's house, but found that the reader of the mysteries of the stars had not put in an appearance.

He was turning to go away when the shabby man came out, and asked him what he desired to know.

"Many things, you spying knave!" he answered, seizing the man by the collar; "and first of all, what you have done with my friend. Who sent him that note, and why? Tell me everything, you miserable cur, or I'll shake you to pieces!"

"I know nothing, sir, absolutely nothing, and I am but a tool in the hands of a clever workman."

"I see, and if I pay you more than your present wages, will you work for me and against him?"

"The best master pays the most."

"There is five dollars. Remember, if you prove false to me, I will have you turned over to the authorities."

"I will remember."

"You referred to the conversation of my friend and my yesterday?"

"I did."

"And reported it to someone else?"

"You speak truly."

"Who was it?"

"Monsieur St. Croix."

"I do not know him."

"He is the astrologer called Anolphe, whose fame has spread through the city."

"Humbug! And this St. Croix wrote a letter to my friend?"

"He did."

murmured, hanging her shapely head; "but I have been taught otherwise."

"They that said so were as false as the evil one. Behold, now, your truest friend—behold your father!"

"My father? Oh, Heaven! can this be true?"

"Indeed—indeed, it is, Zobeide!" said the Egyptian, taking her by the hand. "I am your father, and for years has the false friend, Hassan, poisoned your mind against me, and tried to make you hate me—striven, with all the force of his devilish nature, to injure you, and, by that means, break my heart. I am your father, believe me; and some day I will tell you my pitiful story."

"I believe you now, my father!" she said.

"And now," he continued, "let us resume our march across the desert."

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE STORY AND A TERRIBLE LOSS.

The march was forthwith continued, but the heat becoming intense, and the party arriving at a little green spot where there was a well of the coolest and most sparkling water that Cal had ever tasted, a halt was called, and the tents were pitched.

They rested until nightfall, and then, Laura having resumed the attire of her sex, Zobeide providing her with suitable garments, she and Cal rode side by side, conversing lovingly together, and holding sweet communion after so long a separation.

Selim and Zobeide, as we shall now call the Arab girl altogether—that being her true name—enjoyed each other's company as much as did the Americans, for the language of love is universal, the tender passion finding a resting-place in the hearts of all God's creatures, whether white, brown, red, or yellow—whether Caucasian, Negro, Malay, Indian, or Mongolian; whether Christian, Turk, Infidel, or Buddhist; all nations and tribes feel the influence of the "sweet little cherub that sits up aloft," and all alike being pierced by his arrows. The march was made rapidly, for the desert was more arid than ever, and some of the camels began to suffer from want of food, the dry, coarse plants upon which they fed becoming scarce. Many of them were killed, their meat affording sustenance to the travelers, but rendering necessary the overloading of many of the rest.

One afternoon, while they were resting in the shadow of the tents, our particular friends being gathered together in a group by themselves, Selim suddenly spoke.

"You will, no doubt, wonder," he said, "that I should be so different from the other Arabs, and yet be called by an Arab name."

"I have often thought that very thing," answered Cal. "You are not an Arab?"

"No; I am a Greek. My name is Marco Tijara; but, having lived so long among the Arabs, I have adopted the name of Marco. My old friend, Rhadames, knows me well, and can tell you that I have had a romantic history."

"Tell me, Marco, your life has been an eventful one."

"I was sold of my parents when but a mere child, carried into captivity by the Turks, sold as a slave to the Egyptians, and at one time even in the place of the Khedive himself, I have been a prisoner of war."

"A prisoner of war? and how?"

"I was taken by a band of robbers, and built up a good trade in Cairo, and then a party of caravans and realized large profits. Then the evil spirit came over me again, and I went to the desert, where I met Zobeide, and we pledged ourselves to love and cherish each other."

"I told her when she was a child, but she was then the daughter of a rich man, Hassan, to whom she was betrothed. While her father was away upon a long journey, he sold her away, sold her mother into slavery among the Arab tribes of eastern Egypt, seized upon the property of his friend and departed."

"A black-hearted wretch!" exclaimed Cal.

"Oh, my poor father!" murmured Zobeide.

"I have come to Mezzeh," continued Marco, "thinking that if I had a chance from Cairo he would never be discovered. It has been truly said, that if you want to make a man's name known, do him a kindness. Hassan proved to be the enemy of his former benefactor, and did everything in his power to injure him."

"How does he do?" said Laura.

"He is dead," said Laura. "He was a murderer and an outlaw, and Hassan sought to have Zobeide marry him in order to throw shame upon her."

"I forgive me for ever having loved the traitor!"

said the maiden, throwing her arms about the Egyptian's neck.

"Hassan was a robber!" resumed Marco, "and had to change his quarters from place to place. I discovered his secret as well as the identity of his supposed daughter, there being a peculiar mark upon her arm which I myself saw Rhadames put there."

"I remember it well," interposed the Egyptian; "'Twas the winged globe. I put it there when she was but three years old, and Marco only nine."

"At last the time came when we were pledged to each other, Hassan not daring to interfere, for he knew that his life was no secret to me, and that I would expose him if he opposed my wishes. Zobeide has told you of the combat in the garden, and of my disappearance. I was captured by marauding Bedouins, and only succeeded in escaping and forming a band of my own after two years."

"You have met with many changes," observed Cal.

"Yes, my life has been a curious one. The desert is wide, and my search was necessarily a tedious one; but there is an end to all things, and now I have found my betrothed, avenged myself upon my enemies, assisted those who were in distress as I had once been myself, and reunited those who were separated."

"It sounds like some eastern romance," said Laura. "Who would have supposed that in this wild, desolate land we should meet with so many romantic adventures, marvel at so many mysteries, and listen to such marvelous stories?"

"The east is the very birth-place of romance," said Marco. "Nowhere else will you find so much that is wonderful. Here was born the Genius of story-telling, and nowhere else has it been so richly nourished."

Day followed day and the journey was proceeded with at a rapid rate, the destination being the ancient City of Timbuctoo, where Cal and Laura would find an escort to the coast, the others being determined to remain there.

Suddenly, one morning, as the caravan was preparing to halt, Ismail appeared, looking wild and haggard, his hair streaming, and his manner partaking of that of a madman, that Cal had formerly noticed, but which had of late entirely disappeared.

"The diamond," he said. "The White Sun of the Pharaohs!"

"What of it?"

"It is lost!"

"Lost?" echoed all, in great consternation.

"Ay—lost, and my pilgrimage must be begun once more."

"You must have it!" said Cal.

"No—no, I have it not. It is gone! I placed it in my girdle and now it is not there."

"You may have lost it long ago and not known it."

"Ay, for it is two days since I last looked upon it. I have searched everywhere, and do not find it."

No one spoke a word, for the man's agony was so terrible that words were out of place.

"I shall seek it if I have to search the rest of my life!" the Egyptian said, suddenly.

Then springing suddenly on his camel, he waved his hands and shouted hoarsely as he dashed away:

"Ha-ha-ha! I am the Devil of the Sahara! Woe to those who cross me in my purpose. I am the storm fiend, the spirit of the whirlwind, the Demon of the Desert!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEED OUTSIDE THE CITY GATES.

"I shall certainly see Monsieur St. Croix," mused Gilbert, when he read the strange notice addressed to him by the Frenchman's employee. "But I shall not cross out of it either."

Going first to the commandant, he informed him what had taken place, and requested that an order be issued for the attendance and one for his man be made out and served as soon as he should give the word.

He directed also that the police should keep a watch upon him, so that if St. Croix should attempt any desperate measures against his life he might be protected.

Then he went at once to the Frenchman's house, armed with a revolver, for he did not know what villainy the man might be tempted to commit.

His summons for admission were answered by the shabby man, who seemed very much astonished at seeing the young diplomat, and turned pale.

"He is within," the man said, in a hoarse whisper. "Why did you come here? Depart at once!"

"I came to see your master. Tell him I await him! No—stay. Show me to him this instant!"

"Monsieur is dead!"

"Do as I bid you, and make no remarks."

"But he will kill you!"

"Silence! No treachery, you miserable worm, or I will kill you as well—or what's worse, have you bastinadoed."

The man trembled violently and endeavored to prevent Gilbert from passing, but the latter pushed him aside as if he had been but a child.

At that moment the voice of St. Croix was heard, calling from the floor above:

"What is the matter, Adolph?"

"Answer him!" whispered Gilbert.

"A visitor to see you, sir."

"Tell him I am deeply engaged."

"Say I must see him," whispered Gilbert, and the message was repeated.

"I will not see him."

"Indeed you shall, then!" shouted Gilbert, springing up the steps and confronting St. Croix on the landing.

"What means this intrusion?"

"Aha, Armand Laroque, it is you, is it? You who have presumed to ask for my sister's hand! St. Croix suits you better than your own name, I presume. The police of Paris would not recognize you so quickly, eh?"

"This is an insult, sir!"

"As you like. What have you done with the young physician, Mr. Atwater, whom you lured to the Great Pyramid last night on a false errand?"

The Frenchman started, and suppressed an oath.

"I know your secret, your accomplice has confessed all," said Gilbert, trusting to an untruth to entrap the man into making a confession. "The conversation overheard by him, and reported to you, gave you your idea. You dress the same as he does, look like him in every possible way; that is well conceived. You can work up an alibi in that way very nicely."

"Sir, do you regard me as a criminal?"

"We Americans never mince our words, St. Croix, and when we say anything, we mean it. You are a contemptible scoundrel! What have you done with my sister, you and the thieving Sheik Hassan?"

"Mon Dieu, the man knows everything!" hissed St. Croix. Then recovering himself, he bit his lip and said, hastily: "Parbleu, what do I know of your sister? I do not know who she is."

"You lie, miscreant! You have dared to seek her hand in marriage. She would not tell me of it, but after her abduction I found the proofs in her writing desk. Curse you for an impudent Frenchman, how dare you presume so much?"

Gilbert was becoming terribly excited, and cared not what he said.

St. Croix was white with rage. His thin lips were drawn tightly back from over his white teeth, which were set rigidly, and his eye glistened like that of a wild animal about to spring upon its victim.

"A French gentleman is good enough for the best lady in the world," he muttered.

"Ay, but not a French thief!" answered Gilbert, scornfully.

The Frenchman started to spring upon the American, but the latter struck him a blow in the face that staggered him and drew blood.

"Sacre Bleu! you shall give me satisfaction for this!" hissed the enraged Frenchman. "Name your weapons. I demand an immediate meeting!"

"You shall have it. The revolver is the national weapon of Americans, and I shall use it."

"I have none," retorted the other. "It is a clumsy weapon, and requires no skill to handle. Give me the delicate rapier."

"Take what you will, though I, as the challenged party, have the right to choose my weapon."

"The place? Is not this as good as any?"

"No! In your own house? Do you think me a fool?"

"It is very quiet."

"Ay, too quiet to suit me. How do I know what treachery you may commit?"

"You wrong me," replied the crafty Frenchman, in the suave tones, his manner having greatly changed since the challenge.

"In making you out less a villain than you are? Perhaps you are right," was the answer given, with the most insulting coolness.

"Name your place, if you do not desire to fight here."

"Outside the gates of the city."

"I am content."

"Go first, and I will follow. I'd rather not be seen walking with you; it would hurt my reputation very much."

"Insolent American, you will dearly repent your words to me, when I run my sword through your body."

"Leave your boasts until some more convenient occasion. Follow me if you desire my death," and Gilbert strode from the house.

* * * * *

The moon was shining brightly over the ancient city, and

the sandy reach of desert stretching beyond, when three forms could have been seen walking rapidly away from the river.

Soon they paused, and took their places, Gilbert standing with face to the light.

The word was given, and the two combatants crossed swords the third man standing apart, a little behind the American.

Gilbert fought well, but did not notice that the third man was edging up closer and closer, and that he held a rapier in his hand.

His opponent's face was partly covered with a dark handkerchief, and being also in shadow, was not easily distinguished, Gilbert's own face being bathed in moonlight.

The young man suddenly began to force his opponent to face toward the moon, and, presently, after one desperate lunge, badly parried by his opponent, Gilbert got a good glance at the man's face, the handkerchief falling down.

It was not St. Croix he was fighting, but the tricky scoundrel who served him!

Armand, then, had avoided the duel, and was, doubtless, far from the city by this time.

But there was a third man! Where was he?

Gilbert, apprehending treachery, turned to see if the other was still in sight.

He was not quick enough.

The other man, who had been following him about as he faced Adolph to change his position, suddenly sprang forward and aimed a fearful blow at Gilbert's back.

Gilbert had just time to see that Armand was striking at him when the point of the weapon entered his side.

He made a fierce lunge at the cowardly Frenchman, whose sword was wrenched from his grasp.

Gilbert, feeling faint and giddy, fell upon his face, and the Frenchman's sword was broken, leaving the point sticking in his body.

Then all was a blank, and he remained unconscious.

"Ha-ha," laughed the Frenchman, "he is done for. Come, Adolph, I have a bad wound myself, and it must be attended to. Let us leave this viper here to die."

"Or to be scorched by the fierce sun on the morrow."

"You're right. Confound that Hassan, I trusted him too much. But for that, my brightest hopes would now be realized, and the beautiful American girl would be my wife in spite of herself."

They departed, and through the night the body of the American lay stretched upon the sand, the blood oozing slowly through a wound in the side, and poor Cal, whom he sought to save, riding on across the trackless desert.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO STARTLING SURPRISES.

As Ismail rode away the spirits of the party fell to their lowest ebb.

"We must not let him go alone," said Cal. "Let us follow, and if possible assist him."

"It is useless," answered Selim; "we had better wait until he returns, for even should he chance to meet his foes, they have such a terror of him that they would not molest him."

"For all that we had better follow him."

The woman and half the men remained behind, while Cal, Selim, Said and the rest of the Arabs rode off into the desert in the direction Ismail had taken.

The path was a well defined one, the bones of many a rich caravan pointing out the road for miles and miles.

All one day did the party follow the wild Egyptian, and though they could sometimes see him they could never get near enough to hail him.

Toward night there came a sudden storm of wind and sand, and they saw Ismail hurrying seemingly into the very midst of it.

Then he dropped to the earth and they lost sight of him.

The sand beginning to sweep down upon them at that moment, they quickly prostrated themselves to the ground, while the terrible, biting storm passed over.

It lasted scarcely a minute, not being so violent as the previous storm experienced by Cal, and when it was over the Arabs quickly arose, and continued their pursuit of the stranger being who had led them thus far into the desert.

"He is gone!" exclaimed Said. "He has perished in the sand!"

"He has left no trail, and it is useless for us to attempt to follow him further," said another.

"Push on!" commanded Selim. "He is still alive and will await us."

The march had scarcely been resumed, when the weird form of Ismail was once more seen, and this time approaching instead of retreating.

He was accompanied by someone, who sat behind him upon his camel, and as the two came nearer, Cal thought he recognized the man as a European by his dress.

Ismail came up at last, and riding directly to the side of the American, said, impressively:

"Sahib, I have brought you a friend, through the aid of the marvelous gem, the White Sun."

He had the jewel in his hand and it sparkled as brilliantly as ever, catching the last rays of the declining sun and repeating them a hundred fold.

It was not the wondrous diamond, however, that attracted Cal's attention.

It was the face of Ismail's companion that occupied him.

The form was that of a young man clad in modern garments, which betokened the wearer either an American or European.

The face was startlingly familiar.

"Impossible!" gasped Cal. "It cannot be."

At that moment the young man opened his eyes, muttered a few incoherent words and suddenly caught sight of Cal.

In an instant a look of intelligence came into the glassy eyes, and with one single cry of glad recognition, the stranger held out his hand to Cal and clasped the latter's in a strong grip.

"Cal Atwater—thank God!"

"Gilbert Brentford, upon my life!" ejaculated Cal, returning the pressure. "Who would have expected to see you here?"

"Thank Heaven for guiding the steps of this wonderful being to where I lay, almost perishing," said Gilbert, "for without his aid I must have died!"

"But this diamond?"

"I found it upon the sand, and marveled at its great brilliancy. I knew it must be of inestimable value, but wondered how it should have come there."

"You found it upon the sand?"

"Yes, and would have given it willingly for a drink of water."

"But how came you alone on the desert? You have not followed us all this distance without a guide?"

"No, for I had no idea where you were. I was carried away from Cairo by a band of wandering Arabs, Nubians and Egyptians—a strong horde."

"Ha! the renegades! the hireling dogs!" muttered Ismail, in a rage. "They were a part of my band."

"But how did you happen to meet them?" asked Cal, who could not yet understand the situation of affairs.

"I discovered your absence, and that you had been decoyed away by a false note. Then I ran across St. Croix, who is an adventurer and a fugitive from justice. I fought a duel with him, but, by treachery, was wounded, and left for dead on the sand. When I came to, I found myself traveling over the desert, with the pyramids just fading from sight."

"And have you been, perhaps, close at hand many a time, and we neither of us knew it?"

"I often heard my captors speaking of Ismail and the Demon, but, of course, did not know who they meant. They said that I should be taken to him, but I think they intended to rob me, and sell me for a slave."

"The mercenary fools!" muttered the Egyptian. "They shall be terribly punished if once I discover their hiding place."

"More than once I thought I should perish," continued Gilbert; "but somehow I was sustained, and, though enduring many privations, managed to keep alive."

"I can well imagine what you have suffered."

"Only yesterday, while halting, the motley crew that had captured me suddenly started up in great agitation, and began preparing for instant flight. I could not understand what the matter was, as I knew very little Arabic. Finally, however, I understood one of them to say that the Demon's eye was in the midst of them, and that its presence meant death."

"The Demon's eye?" said Cal, in surprise.

"That's what the man said; that the eye of the Sahara Devil had appeared in their midst, and that if they remained there they would utterly perish."

"What could they mean?"

"I could not tell, for they departed at once, leaving me alone without food, water or a camel, and the sun growing hotter every moment."

"The barbarians!"

"After their departure, I found the wonderful diamond lying upon the sand, and then I knew that, in their superstitious terror, they had thought it the eye of Illah, fixed upon them for some reason, and for this reason they had fled in the wild-est alarm."

"We must have lost it without knowing it at the time," remarked Cal. "It was fortunate we did, for we might never have found you but for that."

"You have seen this scene before, then?" asked Gilbert, much astonished.

"It was I who drew it from its long resting place in the Pyramid, and gave it after many strange adventures into the hands of the last descendant of the Pharaohs. That stone has been one cause of all my troubles, but as it has enabled us to find you, I cannot blame it."

Cal then related the many strange experiences through which the diamond had passed, and Gilbert opened his eyes in astonishment.

"I carried the diamond in my hand and started out to find a place of rest, but after walking for hours, and seeing nothing but the dreary dead level of sand, a sense of my awful situation came over me, and weak and helpless I sank to the ground."

"How long I lay there, of course, I could not tell, but I was awakened by feeling a cooling draught being poured down my throat. I opened my eyes and saw a strange creature with white hair and beard bending over me."

"That was our kind friend Rhadames, known as the Demon of the Desert; he has been of great help to us all," said Cal.

"To us all? You have not found Laura?"

"Yes, we have, and she is awaiting us even now, about a day's march away, upon the desert."

"Let us hasten then and rejoin her. I fear something may happen before we meet."

"You are excited, old fellow, and well you might be, after what you have experienced. We will reach the other division of the party by to-morrow."

The return march had already been resumed, after a slight halt for rest and refreshment, and the party pushed ahead rapidly through the night, never pausing once until the sun was high in the heavens the next day.

There had been no mistake in retracing their steps, for both Selim and Ismail, as we shall continue to call them, were practiced travelers of the desert, and could hold as straight a course as a bird; but when the party reached the place where their friends ought to be awaiting them, there was nothing to be seen.

They pushed ahead for about half an hour and then suddenly came upon a strange scene of carnage and battle.

The dead bodies of camels and men lay upon the sand in great confusion, and by the appearance of things a fierce combat had lately taken place.

Many of the friends of Selim and Ismail were found, and there was left no doubt in the minds of the party that their friends had been set upon by enemies and murdered.

"Great heaven! I feared something would happen," said Gilbert. "What can have become of my sister?"

"Murad and Hassan both being dead, I know not who could have done this deed," observed Selim; "but most likely the beauty of the ladies has attracted some one and they have been carried away."

"Then let us follow and recover them," said Cal, fiercely. "Both you and I, noble Marco, have an aim in view."

"Ay, and we will accomplish it, though our path lead to the sea."

"My way leads to Timbuctoo or to the ocean, wherever I list," said the Egyptian. "Zobeide, my long lost child, calls for me, and whither she goes, there is my path."

Pausing a moment while they took one last look at their murdered friends, the Demon swung his cimeter over his head, and, with a wild shout, the whole party dashed off.

"Now, by this radiant sun!" shouted the Egyptian, holding the White Sun aloft, "I swear to rest not until we have rescued the maidens and avenged the deaths of our friends and brothers!"

"By the White Sun of the Pharaohs we swear it!" shouted the whole party, Cal and Gilbert included, as they fairly flew over the sands, making nothing of the fierce heat or of the scorching surface over which they rode with the speed of the wind.

A tremendous cloud of dust enveloped and accompanied them, and they could hardly see anything ahead, so thick were the flying clouds of sand.

At last another cloud similar to theirs is seen, and they increase their speed.

"We have come up with the villains," mutters Marco, the Greek. "Spare not a single one."

With a shout the pursuing party dashes on, while the others pause, set their lances, and give an answering shout.

Then, with a fierce shock, the two bands come together, and friend and foe are alike indistinguishable in the horrible confusion which ensues.

CHAPTER XXV

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"Yield, you Arab dogs!" yelled Marco, smiting right and left, and tumbling one of his foes into the dust at every blow.

"Give up the maidens, or be slain to the last man!" cried Rhadames, dealing terrible blows upon all within reach of his arm.

"Yankee land forever!" shouted Cal, seizing a brawny Arab by the throat, and thrusting his cimeter through his body. "Hurrah for the stars and stripes!"

"Where is the white woman?" cried Gilbert, following up Marco's blows. "Release her at once, or perish every man!"

Said and the Nubians, Marco and his Arabs, Cal, Gilbert and all the rest rushed impetuously upon the foe, and at every blow a man fell dead, but nothing was seen of any of the women.

Neither Zemilla, Zobeide, or Laura could be seen, and in fact, no women whatever, and yet the party must have been the same that attacked the other division of the caravan, for packed upon the camels were many things which Marco recognized as having belonged to his men.

"Where are the women?" he demanded, seizing the leader by the throat, and dragging him from his seat as the rest of the party broke and fled.

"Spare me, and I will tell you!" groaned the wretch, growing black in the face.

"Speak quickly, then, Mohammedan cur, or I will slice off your ears close to your head!"

"They have gone on with the rest of our band toward where the sun nightly cools his fiery orb in the trackless waters."

"How many are they in number? Speak truly, or I will slit your nostrils like those of the base swine that wallow in the meadows of the Nile!"

"They far outnumber your band, and when our runners shall reach them, they will return and cut you to pieces."

"Liar! thou deservest death for that, but I will spare you if you will guide us to the robbers. They have a town or encampment upon the borders of the mighty waters?"

"Yes, and there may be found hundreds of valiant warriors."

"Guide us thither, and go astray at your peril!"

The camels and stores of the slain Arabs were taken possession of, and after a rest of several hours, haste being out of the question for the present, the party set out, headed by Ismail, Marco, and the Arab, who was called Muley Hassan.

It will not be necessary to describe the march, which was made as rapidly as possible, and only the most necessary delays being allowed; for, owing to the western end of the desert being far more wild and barren than the eastern, the chances of finding the means of sustaining life were infinitely smaller than before.

Day after day passed, and as the shores of the broad ocean were brought nearer, the desolation increased, and it seemed as if everything was conspiring to defeat the aims of the Americans.

Nothing had been seen of the party who had carried away the women, and at last Marco threatened to kill Muley for having led them astray.

"Lying dog of a Bedouin!" he said, fiercely, drawing his cimeter and whipping Muley's turban from his head, "look your last upon that sun now sinking below the desert, for the end of your base life is approaching."

"For my life you will have to pay twenty," said the Bedouin, haughtily. "Even now our tribe is but a little way distant."

"Lying slave, receive this reward of your treachery!"

With one fierce sweep of the shining blade the head of the traitor was severed from his body, and rolled over upon the sand, while his lifeless trunk lay in a pool of blood close beside it.

The sun went down like a ball of fire, and as the caravan dashed up a sudden steep incline, behold! the whole broad Atlantic came in sight.

At that very instant there was a wild hurrah, and an overwhelming horde of Arabs rushed down upon the little party, while not far away could be seen a group of boys, decrepid old men and a number of women, among whom Gilbert was sure he recognized Laura!

"The villains outnumber us two to one," said Rhadames; "but I care not for that. I possess a power ye know not of! Upon them, and follow me closely. I seek to release the women! After that chance must direct us!"

With a yell and a sweep, the party bore down upon the enemy, and attacked them with great violence.

Blows fell faster and thicker than raindrops, and the onslaught might have been termed the very tornado of battle, so terribly and irresistibly did it come.

The foemen fell in great numbers, but they seemed to be as the sands of the desert, and as fast as the savage warriors fell, their places would be taken by others.

Rhadames was in the very thickest of the fray, and more than one ferocious Arab sought his life, but unsuccessfully.

At last a combined effort was made against him, and suddenly cut off from his friends, he found himself surrounded on every side by vindictive foes, while a dozen weapons were pointed at his breast.

Quickly throwing aside the loose robe that covered his chest, he exposed his inner vest, and cried out, in shrill tones:

"Behold your master, you unclean dogs, and creep away to your kennels!"

There was a cry of astonishment from the Arabs, and every weapon was lowered.

They had beheld that which subdued them, and not one of that furious band would have dared to harm the Egyptian, as he hoped to enter Paradise.

What had caused this sudden and complete change?

They had beheld their master indeed, and trembled at having aroused his wrath.

Fitting tightly to his body, the Egyptian wore a coat of fine, exquisitely-woven chain armor of hardest steel, and over this was a vest of green silk, which fairly blazed with jewels and rich embroideries.

In the center of all was a device, which every man recognized as the emblem of the Grand Master of the most sacred and ancient order of Free Masonry; probably one of the oldest orders of which there is any account, or older still.

Most of the Arabs belonged to the different orders of masonry, the brotherhood numbering a vast number of adherents in the eastern countries, many of the degrees being unobtainable anywhere else.

They at once recognized in Rhadames one of the Fakirs of the Inner Temple, and more than that, the very highest masonic dignity in the east, and it was no wonder they trembled.

With pallid lips, and tottering limbs, in silence and in shame, they slunk away, leaving their dead on the field, and offering not the slightest molestation to any of the Demon's party.

When they had all departed, and were completely out of sight, Rhadames said, proudly:

"Did I not tell thee I had the power to scatter these caitiffs to the four winds? Yet would I not use this dread power till all else had failed, till my single arm would not suffice to overwhelm the vermin."

"I never knew this, my master!" said Marco, approaching. "yet have I known thee from a child."

"Mine is not a secret to be lightly told, my son," replied the Egyptian, rearranging his disordered robe; "and only in desperate cases do I make it known. More than once on this terrible journey across the desert, has this power of mine rendered me great assistance."

"I doubt it not," returned the Greek.

The Americans regarded this scene with surprise, the idea of one man having such power over a horde of untamed Arabs being very remarkable, and the knowledge of the fact that he could do so greatly increasing their respect for him.

"Let us continue our journey to yonder desert of waters," spoke the Egyptian, at length. "The way is still long, though the ocean seems so near."

"You will leave us then?" asked Cal. "You will not go with us?"

"I cannot; I have still my mission to perform. The White Sun is not yet in its place on the holy altar. Until that time I can know no rest. Let us push on, for the night advances."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE END OF THE JOURNEY ACROSS THE DESERT.

The next day the travelers arrived at the end of the desert, and stood upon the shores of the mighty ocean.

The plan of Rhadames was to go down the coast until they reached some place where a ship could be taken, which would bear the Americans to a port whence they could reach Cairo.

All one day they traveled until night, when they encamped as usual, starting out the next day in the morning.

They could see now and then huge rocks rearing their heads to the sky, while the foam and spray dashed furiously against them.

Here and there were the wrecks of noble vessels cast upon the rocks and the sand, bleaching in the sun and the wind, and telling many tales of storm and disaster.

How many sad stories could the crews of those vessels have told, of captivity among the Arabs, of robbery and murder, of inhuman cruelty and unendurable sufferings to which death put a welcome end?

Suddenly Cal gave a great shout.

"A sail—a sail! We shall be saved, thank Heaven!"

Sure enough, off on the horizon, looking like a white bird,

was a sail scarcely distinguishable at first, and then growing plainer.

"We must hail them," said Gilbert, "they will not see us otherwise."

"We have no means of letting them know of our presence," said Cal, sadly; "and they will sail away from us without ever knowing how near they were to us."

"There must be some way of attracting their attention," said Laura. "See, they are coming nearer every moment. How do castaways signal ships?"

"By hoisting flags, making bonfires, firing cannons and other things," said Cal, adding, gloomily, "but we can't do anything of the kind because we have no resources."

"We can light a fire at all events," said Gilbert, suddenly. "One of those battered wrecks down there will make a splendid blaze."

"It's a wonder that the thieving Arabs have left anything to burn," said Cal; "if wood could be used like iron they wouldn't leave a stick. I'll bet that you won't find a solitary nail, screw, bolt, traveler or the least scrap of iron on any of those wrecks."

"Well, we don't want iron; we can't burn it," said Gilbert.

"How are you going to light your wood, in the first place?"

"Take your watch crystal."

"Watch crystal! I like that. Here's a man that's lived among a lot of thieving Arabs for two or three months talking about a watch crystal. It's a wonder you've got any teeth left. You wouldn't have if there'd been any gold filling in them."

The sail had been drawing nearer and nearer, but was still too far away to enable any of the sailors to see the travelers.

The whole party went down upon the beach, and paused before the battered wreck of a once gallant ship, which lay high and dry on the rocks.

The Egyptian soon produced a flame, and before long a column of thick smoke arose straight in the air to a great height, and then floated off over the desert.

The dry wood snapped and cracked, and the flames roared, and hissed, and sputtered, the smoke meanwhile growing in volume, and the heat becoming intense.

"If they see us they will take us for a party of wild Arabs and not dare to land," said Cal, as the passing ship tacked, having evidently seen the smoke.

"We can tell them who we are."

"So we might if they were near us, but you don't suppose they are going to come ashore, not knowing whether we intend to slaughter them or not?"

"They do see us, and are coming to save us."

"Yes, and pretty soon they will get out their spy-glasses, take us for a lot of murdering Arabs and fly away as fast as they can."

"You are too gloomy, my dear fellow," said Gilbert.

"Gloomy? Well, perhaps I am, but I have been on the point of being saved so many times since we left the Pyramids, and suffered so much worse afterward, that I have lost faith in everything, and I shall not believe that we are saved till I set foot on the deck of yonder ship and know that she's a good respectable vessel and no pirate."

The Egyptian, running his long spear through a blanket, waved the improvised signal flag from the back of his camel, hoping to attract attention, the fire still being kept up.

The captain of the ship evidently saw the signals, but being upon a bad coast, hesitated about sending a boat ashore, for fear some treachery was intended.

He swung in as close as he dared, and got out his spy-glasses and speaking trumpets, while the travelers made all possible demonstrations, and the fire blazed away at a tremendous rate.

At last the ship swung in quite close, where there was considerable depth of water, though there was a dangerous shoal close at hand, and the captain, jumping into the rigging, speaking-trumpet in hand, shouted out:

"Who are you—friends, or foes?"

"Friends—Americans!" shouted Cal, in a shrill tone, which he knew could be heard furthest. "The Arabs are our friends!"

"I daren't trust 'em; send 'em back into the desert and I'll pick you up, but I wouldn't trust an Arab with a bad half dollar."

Cal repeated the words to the Egyptian.

"As I supposed, the skipper is alarmed at the presence of so large a party of Arabs, and thinks we are but decoys. The Bedouins of this coast have not inspired ship-owners with any great amount of confidence, and you must not blame this worthy captain for distrusting you."

"I do not. Our journey is not yet finished. We will leave you—the Arabs to the Soudan coast, I and my family to Timbuctoo."

"We shall be sorry to part with you," said Cal, "but I suppose fate decrees it so."

The Egyptian, rising in his saddle, spoke a few words to the Arabs in an impressive tone, pointing to the ship and to the three Americans.

In an instant every man was in the saddle, and with a wild whoop they dashed off en masse, ascending to the plains above and sweeping down the coast with the speed of the wind.

"Farewell, sahib," said the Demon, for so Cal still called him, "and be assured that the prayers of Rhadames, the last descendant of the Pharaohs, shall be ever with you. The gratitude of a whole people shall be yours, and in the splendor of this magnificent jewel shall shine thy virtues—thy courage. Sahib, receive my blessing ere I bid thee farewell for the last time."

Cal kneeled on the sand, and the old man extended his hand in a benediction over the young man's bowed head.

Laura and Gilbert joined Cal, and together received the benediction of the old man whose life had so long been a terrible mystery to the wild tribes of the desert.

The parting between Zobeide and Laura was most tender, the two maidens having learned to love each other with full hearts, and Cal thought they never would finish saying good-by.

At last all were mounted, and the three Americans were standing alone on the rocks.

"Farewell," was the last word uttered by the Egyptian. "I go to place the White Sun of the Pharaohs in our holy temple, and there shall I find rest; then shall I lay my old bones in the dust, and sink to sleep. I shall remember thee as long as I live. Farewell!"

Then the four long-separated, happily-united friends waved a last farewell to the Americans, and in a few moments had disappeared forever from their sight.

"I have lost one of the best friends I ever had," said Cal. "There goes the last I shall ever see of the Demon of the Desert."

"See—see, they are lowering a boat for us," said Gilbert, who had turned toward the sea as the plumed turbans of the two men disappeared up the rocky pass, "they are coming at last to save us."

"I feel just as if I did not care to go," said Cal, softly, placing his arm around Laura; "the desert has been my home so long, but see—see, God bless it, the brave old stars and stripes floating from the peak. Hurrah, that makes me feel like a new man. Ha-ha, there's no place like home!"

The sight of the dear old flag which the jolly skipper had had hoisted as the boat rowed to land, made the tears come to the eyes of our three friends, and they embraced each other for very joy.

The boat grated on the sands, the three rescued friends scrambled in and were pulled to the ship, the Sunbeam, from Stonington, bound for Leghorn, and then home, and by nightfall the desert was but a speck in the distance.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FAREWELL TO AFRICA—HOME AGAIN—CONCLUSION.

The good captain of the Sunbeam, Jonathan Briggs, listened to the story of Cal's wanderings in open-eyed astonishment, and he could not find words in which to express his amazement.

To have journeyed twenty-eight hundred miles over a stretch of barren desert, and be still alive, was a marvel; and had he not seen that Cal was in dead earnest, he would scarcely have believed him.

The two old chums were given a bunk together in the cabin, and Laura was accommodated with the captain's own stateroom, and as his wife sometimes accompanied him upon his voyages, it contained many little comforts that the young lady hardly expected to find.

Cal still wore the plain gold ring given him by the strange old man to whose timely aid he had more than once owed his life, and Laura had the wonderful necklace which exceeded in beauty anything that the skipper had ever seen, although he had not the slightest idea of its wonderful value.

Cal made him a present of two or three of the unset gems, and he promised to have them made into a brooch for his wife, as soon as he got home.

He did so, and the good old soul, knowing their value, and

appreciating their worth on account of their associations, felt as proud as a queen when wearing the handsome ornament on her plump neck, and never tired of telling her friends the story of their being taken from the Pyramid, carried thousands of miles across the most barren country in the world and borne across the sea to her village home, where they became the delight and admiration of all beholders.

Many storms overtook the Sunbeam, and more than once it seemed as if she would be driven on the rocks and wrecked.

Once they were chased by Algerine pirates, but the sight of the "gridiron" at the peak, and the sound of the small cannon mounted upon the poop, and blazing away at them in defiance, made the wretches turn about and let the Sunbeam go on her way unmolested.

It seemed as if the blessing of the old Egyptian followed them, for in spite of storm and tempest, pirates and cruisers, revenue officers and commissariats, they at last started on their way across sunny Italy to Otranto, thence across to Greece and Athens, whence they expected to procure passage to Alexandria, and from there go by rail to Cairo.

Once in civilized countries neither Cal nor Gilbert had any difficulty in obtaining letters of credit, and getting all the money they wanted, Gilbert running across diplomatic friends who gave him introductions, and assisted him in every way.

The wardrobes of the travelers, which had grown rather small and dilapidated, not to say grotesque, were replenished, and as they journeyed on they looked like persons of distinction flying around in foreign countries for the fun of the thing.

They were all very much tanned from long exposure to the sun, but as Cal and his sweetheart occasionally conversed in Arabic for amusement, they were looked upon as Eastern dignitaries traveling incognito, and were treated with great distinction. Gilbert was obliged to return to Cairo, to attend to his official business, but Cal declared that as soon as his old chum and future brother had reported himself that he was going to take Laura back to America.

"I have had all I want of Africa," he said, "and I shall be abundantly satisfied if I never see or hear of it again. I know when I have had more than enough of the dark continent."

"But you haven't seen half of it," said Gilbert, laughing.

"What I have seen has taken away any desire of seeing the rest. Perhaps you would like to have me go after the source of the Nile, or look for the Garden of Eden?"

"Africa is a fine country."

"Yes, so it is, to live out of. I am entirely satisfied with what I have seen, and I am going home. America is good enough for me any day. You'll go, won't you, Laura?"

Laura said she would, and so Gilbert said no more about it.

From Athens, the three friends sailed across the Mediterranean to Alexandria, and from there they took the train to Cairo, Cal having no desire to take the slow and noisy, though picturesque Nile boat, with its singing sailors, piles of freight of every description, and swarms of begging Arabs, infesting it at every stopping-place.

At last the ancient city was reached, after a long absence, and Gilbert, who had already sent word of his coming, repaired to the Consul-General's office.

Cal strolled into the Royal Egyptian Hotel with Laura upon his arm, and walking up to the desk, said to the astonished clerk, after handing him his card:

"I did not come back as soon as I said I would, you see. Have you kept my room ready?"

The clerk recognized the young man, and laughed heartily, saying that he had certainly been gone a long time.

"But then I returned by a rather roundabout way, and I suppose that's what made me so long," replied Cal, with a hearty laugh. "I'll take my old room if it is not engaged."

Gilbert found that his long absence had necessitated a change in the office arrangements, and that his place had been supplied. The wheels of diplomacy must not be clogged on

account of such trifles as a young man being carried across the desert by Arabs.

He learned, also, that St. Croix had been arrested upon suspicion of having caused his disappearance, and had confessed to having left him for dead upon the desert, and that it was that as much as anything that had caused his position to be filled.

St. Croix was delivered up to the French authorities, and sent to the galleys for five years, but previous to his departure, he admitted that he had conceived a deep plot to obtain possession of Laura, and put Gilbert out of the way.

He had intercepted all letters and dispatches to young Brentford which came from America, and discovering that Cal was coming, had determined to get rid of him, also.

How nearly he succeeded in his plans we have already seen, and had it not been for the baseness and treachery of his Arab accomplices, he would have carried out his plot successfully.

He was, most providentially, foiled in the most important part of his scheme, and through Gilbert's precaution in leaving word at the legation to look out for the Frenchman in case he (Gilbert) was missing, the scoundrel was overtaken and punished.

His accomplice, the shabby-looking spy of the cafe, made himself scarce as soon as St. Croix got into trouble, and he was never again seen in that part of the world.

Cal persuaded Gilbert to return to the United States, and apply for a government position at Washington, and the young man decided to do so, not caring to remain alone in a foreign land.

So the three, after visiting the curious places in upper Egypt, started upon their return to the home which all longed to see once again, and without making the journey unnecessarily long, though they stopped a day or so at the most noted cities upon their route, they at last reached Liverpool, and took the steamer for New York, Cal being the life of the cabin, and all three doing their utmost to make the voyage a pleasant one to all.

Gilbert obtained an excellent position at Washington, and Cal and his lovely wife, nee Miss Laura Brentford, spend every winter with him.

Among all the brilliant toilets at state dinners and receptions, none are as superb as that of the young physician's wife, whose snowy neck is always encircled with the priceless necklace whose story Cal is never tired of telling.

Cal resumed the practice of medicine more for the sake of having something to do than for any other reason, and while he may not be one of the famous leeches of the land, his practice is not inconsiderable; and did he not devote the larger part of it to charitable purposes, his income from that source would be quite large.

One thing more, and our story is finished.

Not long ago, Cal, in reading an account of a journey through Eastern lands, published in a foreign newspaper, came across an account of a remarkably brilliant diamond to be seen in the Mahommedan temple at Timbuctoo, which, the account said, was supposed to have been recovered from the great Pyramid, and deposited in the temple by an Egyptian, since dead, and reposing within a beautiful tomb in the temple, who was reputed to have been a lineal descendant of Sesostris the Great.

Cal knew then that his old friend, the Demon of the Desert, had kept his vow, and that there in the temple, the wonder of tourists, and the revered of the faithful, reposed, for all ages, that beautiful stone, the White Sun of the Pharaohs!

THE END.

Read "CAPTAIN LUCIFER; OR, THE SECRET OF THE SLAVE SHIP," which will be the next number (80) of "Pluck and Luck."

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